

**Identity formation and the Gospel of Matthew: A socio-narrative  
reading**

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## **Declaration**

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## Abstract

With the assumption that texts have identity-forming roles, this study attempted to answer the question: Why does the author of the Gospel of Matthew include non-Judean characters in his narrative?

To explore a possible answer to this question, I coined and used the *socio-narrative reading method*, which merges socio-scientific criticism, narrative criticism, and semiological reading through social identity, characterisation, and semiotic theories as a heuristic interpretive tool.

I contend that the implied author of Matthew used the non-Judean characters to form the identity of the ideal readers' community. This community is not a specific, isolated community, but an imagined 1<sup>st</sup>-century group of people, i.e., an ideal readers' community, who could read, grasp, and accept the ideology<sup>1</sup> propagated by the Gospel of Matthew as it was expressed by the implied author in the narrative.

Many Matthean scholars have pointed to the role of the non-Judean characters in the Matthean narrative as having implications for the mission to the non-Judeans, but without providing a theoretical basis. I argue that Ronald Barthes' semiological reading method, specifically the second order meaning of stories, fills this lacuna in Matthean scholarship. Furthermore, most of the studies on the non-Judean characters in the Gospel of Matthew considered them as a reflection of the addressed community. However, I contend that these characters have an identity forming role. I argue that, on the one hand, the implied author used the negatively stereotyped non-Judeans in the Matthean Jesus' teaching (i.e. Matt. 5:47; 6:7; 6:32; 18:17; and 20:19), which are exemplified in the stories of the negatively characterised non-Judean individuals such as the Gadarenes (Matt. 8:32-34), Pilate (Matt. 27:1-6; 27:62-66), and the Roman soldiers (Matt. 27: 27-28:15), to demonstrate the "otherness", the "outsiderness" of the non-Judeans. On the other hand, the positively characterised non-Judeans in the genealogy account (Matt. 1:1-17), the Magi (Matt. 2:1-12), the centurion (Matt. 8:5-13), and the Canaanite woman (Matt. 15: 21-28) are used in the Matthean narrative to form the identity of

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<sup>1</sup> In this dissertation ideology has the meaning of what the implied author wants to promote, such as in the first century context in which the idea of non-Judeans being a part of God's people and rightful beneficiaries of the kingdom blessings was contested, the implied author promote the possibility of the non-Judeans being a part of such people.

the ideal readers' community. If the positively characterised non-Judeans were shown to be rightful beneficiaries of the messianic blessings, the social boundary that excluded non-Judeans, who were perceived as others and outsiders in relation to God's people, is either compromised or demolished. Therefore, the positive and negative characterisations of non-Judeans in the Matthean narrative have a role in forming the identity of the ideal readers' community.

## Opsomming

Hierdie studie het, met die aanname dat tekste 'n identiteit-vormende rol speel, gepoog om die vraag te beantwoord: “Waarom sluit die skrywer van die Evangelie van Matteus nie-Judese karakters in sy vertelling in?”

Om die vraag te ondersoek, het ek 'n leesmetode ontwikkel wat ek die sosio-narratiewe leesmetode noem. Dit is 'n samesmelting van sosio-wetenskaplike kritiek, narratiewe kritiek, en semiologiese lees, deur gebruik te maak van sosiale identiteit, karakterisering en semiotiese teorieë as 'n heuristiese werktuig.

Ek voer aan dat die geïmpliseerde skrywer die nie-Judese karakters gebruik het om die identiteit van die ideale lesersgemeenskap te vorm. Hierdie gemeenskap is nie 'n spesifieke, geïsoleerde gemeenskap nie, maar 'n verbeelde groep mense uit die eerste eeu, dit wil sê 'n ideale lesersgemeenskap wat die ideologie wat deur die Matteus-evangelie gepropageer is, sou kon lees, begryp en aanvaar soos dit deur die geïmpliseerde outeur vertel is. Baie navorsers het al daarop gewys dat die rol van die nie-Judese karakters in die boek Matteus, implikasies het vir die sending aan nie-Jode, maar geen teoretiese basis daarvoor gebied nie. Ek meen dat Ronald Barthes se semiologiese leesmetode, spesifiek die tweede-orde betekenis van die verhale, hierdie leemte in die Matteus-navorsing kan vul. In studies oor die nie-Judese karakters in die Evangelie van Matteus, word hulle dikwels beskou as 'n weerspieëling van die kontekstuele gemeenskap aan wie die boek gerig was. Ek beweer egter dat hierdie karakters 'n identiteit-vormende rol speel. Ek argumenteer dat die geïmpliseerde skrywer aan die een kant die negatiewe stereotipering van nie-Judeërs deur Jesus (cf. Matt. 5:47; 6:7; 6:32; 18:17; en 20:19), en voorbeelde van negatief gekarakteriseerde nie-Jode, soos die Gadareners (Matt. 8:32-34), Pilatus (Matt. 27:1-6; 27:62-66) en die Romeinse soldate (Matt. 27:27-28:15) gebruik het om die “andersheid”, “buitestaanderheid” van nie-Jode te toon. Aan die ander kant is die positief gekarakteriseerde nie-Jode in die genealogiese verslag (Matt. 1:1-17), die wyse manne (Matt. 2:1-12), die offisier (Matt. 8:5-13) en die Kanaänitiese vrou (Matt. 15:21-28) in die Matteus-verhaal gebruik om die identiteit van die ideale lesersgemeenskap te vorm. As die positief gekarakteriseerde nie-Jode beskou word as mense wat die reg het om te deel in die messiaanse seëninge, word die sosiale grens wat nie-Jode uitsluit en hulle as “anders” of “buitestanders” in verhouding tot God se volk beskou, gekompromitteer of afgebreek. Daarom speel die positiewe

en negatiewe karakterisering van nie-Jode in die Mattheus-verhaal 'n rol in die vorming van die identiteit van die ideale lesersgemeenskap.

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# Chapter One

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Description of research focus

This study investigates the role of the Gospel of Matthew in forming the identity of an ideal readers' community.<sup>2</sup> It focuses on the role of the inclusion of positively characterised individual non-Judean<sup>3</sup> characters, such as the four non-Judeans in the genealogy account (Matt. 1:1-17), the Magi (Matt. 2:1-12), the centurion (Matt. 8:5-13), and the Canaanite woman (Matt. 15:21-28), and the stereotypical negative depiction of non-Judeans in Jesus' teaching which is exemplified through negatively characterised individual non-Judean figures' stories (cf. Matt. 8:28-34; 27:1-6; 27:62-66; 27:27-28:15), in shaping the identity of the community by undertaking a "socio-narrative reading" (see Chapter Three) of these accounts.

Since the Enlightenment period, the focus of studies of the gospels has been on their historical context. Before the 1970s, historical approaches were primarily used for investigating their sources, form, messages, and the historical situation in which they were written (Stibbe, 1993:5). These investigations, however, mostly ignored the social dimensions of the text itself (Elliott, 1993:18). Instead, they mostly explored issues surrounding the Matthean community or church (Meier, 1991:625; Stanton, 1983) and, for example, tried to address the issue of the anti-Semitic tendency of the First Gospel (Garland, 1979; Fitzmyer, 1965:667-671). Though some scholars explored the association of the Matthean community with its contemporary

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<sup>2</sup> Ideal readers' community: in this dissertation this phrase designates the 1<sup>st</sup>-century group of people who read, grasped, and accepted the ideology propagated by the Gospel of Matthew as it was intended by the implied author in the narrative. The ideal readers' community is not considered as a replacement for Israel but rather a new group of people as the reconstituted Israel, which founded itself on Israel's tradition that permits non-Judeans to be part of their community and partake of the messianic blessings. However, this community is not necessarily a reflection of the existing community; it could be, but it is an imagined/proposed community.

<sup>3</sup> Regarding the debate about the word Judean (see Mason, 2007:457-512; Schwartz, 2007:3-27), the terms Judean and non-Judean are used to make a clear ethnic distinction between *Ιουδαῖος* and *ἔθνος*, which most scholars translate as "Jews" and "Gentiles" respectively.



Jewish counterparts, they mainly focussed on the Christian-Jewish conflict and the polemic nature of the Gospel of Matthew (Stanton, 1983:264-268). Their studies also concentrated on certain passages, such as Matt. 23 and 27:25. During the last few decades, interest has grown in cross-disciplinary approaches that explore the conflict of the Matthean community with its Jewish parent body (Balch, 1991).

More recent Matthean studies, specifically those that have attempted to utilise a socio-historical (Malina and Pilch, 2008:154-193) or a social-scientific (Elliott, 1993:8) approach, have made a start towards identifying the social situations behind various writings and not just the conflict between them. These studies provide significant insight to scholars about the social context of the New Testament texts.

The identity of the first readers of each gospel has also captured the scholarly imagination for decades. It has been a while since Graham Stanton identified the core of the issues behind Matthean studies:

[w]as the evangelist himself a Jew or a Gentile? Were his Christian readers mainly Jews or Gentiles? Were Matthew's communities still under strong pressure from the neighboring synagogues? Or was Jews' persecution of Christians a matter of past history for the evangelist's communities? (Stanton, 1995:2)

David Sim believes the issues identified by Stanton still draw scholars' attention, saying that the issue of "whether this Christian community was still within Judaism or had separated from it, both physically or ideologically, has intensified considerably and is now without question the dominant theme in Matthean studies" (Sim, 2011:6).

Past Matthean studies indicate two main theories regarding to whom the gospel was addressed. The first, promoted by scholars such as Anthony J. Saldarini (1994) and David Sim (1998:5), argues for the Judeans of this community as its intended readers. The second suggestion is advocated by Matthean scholars like Graham Stanton and Donald A. Hagner (2003:194), who contend it was a community detached from its mother religion, Judaism, with a clear Christian nature.

From the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century many scholars approached the gospels as they did the letters of Paul: as documents written for specific, demarcated communities. This, in turn, produced

studies that sought to read the gospels as veiled descriptions of their authorial communities. This interpretive lens, reading the gospel as a narrative both about, and responding to, the needs of the authorial community, colours most of Matthean scholarship. The primary focus of the scholars who have dealt with the *Sitz im Leben* of the Matthean community, is the association between the formative Judaism and this community (Sim, 2001:269).

Some scholars have used social identity theory to study the relationship between Judaism and the Matthean community, but their endeavour is compromised, because applying social identity theory to a reconstructed community out of which the gospel emerged, is hampered by the fact that there is no consensus among scholars about the nature of this community. Over the past few decades, a significant number of Matthean scholars have cautioned against imaginative portraits of the “Matthean community”, contending that it is a product of too much guesswork. Therefore, they argue, this quest will never be concluded satisfactorily (Burridge, 1998:113-146; Bauckham, 1998a:48).

Richard Bauckham further questions the validity of the quest for a specific community for each gospel assumed by modern scholarship. He challenges the notion that each gospel was written to a specific community or reflects the social situation of a specific community (Bauckham, 1998a:9-48; cf. Burridge, 1998:113-146). Instead, Bauckham claims that “the Gospels were written with the intention that they should circulate around all the churches” (Bauckham, 1998b:2). Based on the accepted assumption of Markan priority and Matthew’s and Luke’s reduction of it, and also the nature of the gospels themselves, he contends that each gospel has an indefinite implied readership and that the authors anticipated that the gospels would circulate among the Christian community throughout the ancient Mediterranean world (Bauckham, 1998a:12-13). As this study will argue later, this challenge does not affect this project, which bases its assumption on the identity-forming role of the gospels. Even though the ancient biographic nature of the gospels shows that the gospels were not written to a particular community, this does not necessarily imply that the author of Matthew’s gospel did not have a targeted audience or that he simply wrote it for a random audience. Rather, this research assumes the Gospel of Matthew was written for a wider audience in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. The author of Matthew assumed that some of his readers, the ideal readers’ community, would be able to understand his gospel and it would have a certain formative impact on them. The impact was not intended for a specific, isolated community, but for all its readers, who could have lived in

more than one locality but faced the same issues. Therefore, this study assumes that the Gospel of Matthew was written to address issues current at the time of its composition.

The difference between the approach followed in this study and the one advocated by the historical-critical method, is that the latter begins its study by assuming *the existence of a specific community in a certain locality*, in Matthew's case, the Matthean community, and that the gospel reflects the historical and social situation of the particular community to which it was addressed. Therefore, it accepts that by reading a gospel, it is possible to study the community to which the gospel was addressed. In contrast, the approach of this study assumes the gospels were addressed to the wider 1<sup>st</sup>-century Christians in general and that the gospels have a general identity forming role. Thus, it does not postulate that the Gospel of Matthew reflects an already existing community. Instead, it attempts to study how the author constructed his narrative to form the identity of the ideal readers' community in general to become a new community. It suggests that social identity theory can be utilised to examine this identity formation process.

Baker notes the importance of this identity forming role of the text (Baker, 2011:228-237). It is particularly relevant when we consider that the New Testament texts were generally also intended to have an educational and communal orientation role (Carter, 2008:511-513). G.D. Kilpatrick (1946:59-100), for example, contends that the gospel was written to make the community disciples. In this regard, R.A. Burridge (1992:14, 80) demonstrates how the gospel forms the identity of its community by demonstrating its similarity with the ancient Greco-Roman biography. In the manner of ancient biographers, the gospel writers presented Jesus as a prototype/model to be followed. Therefore, the gospels have a role in forming the identity of the communities that read it.

Building upon the previous research conducted by Bauckham and other contemporary Matthean scholars, this research hopes to address a gap in research related to the ideological intentions of the author of the Gospel of Matthew. The study will argue that the gospel's message shaped the social identity of its ideal readers' community, that is, various 1<sup>st</sup>-century Christian communities. It argues further that the Gospel of Matthew uses various non-Judean characters to do this. Thus, this study contributes to Matthean scholarship by investigating the way the implied author used non-Judean characters to form the identity of the ideal readers' community using a socio-narrative reading tool (see Chapter Three).

## **1.2. Objective, Problem statement and contribution of research**

### **1.2.1. Objective**

This research will specifically look at how the implied author of the Gospel of Matthew used his writing to form the identity of the ideal readers' communities, which are postulated to have been 1<sup>st</sup>-century Christian communities. By investigating in particular the inclusion of non-Judean characters in this gospel narrative, the research aims to show how the implied author sought to shape the identity of the ideal readers' community and how the story is intended to be received by the ideal readers' community.

### **1.2.2. Research problem**

The research will attempt to address the following problems:

- The Gospel of Matthew characterises non-Judeans both positively and negatively, and this is often seen by Matthean scholars as a reflection a tension created between Judeans and non-Judeans. For centuries, the portrayal of non-Judeans in the Matthean narrative has been puzzling Matthean scholars and many attempts have been made to understand if the author viewed them positively or negatively (see 2.5). Though there have been a lot of studies from different perspectives on the non-Judean characters presented in the Gospel of Matthew, so far, no study has specifically addressed the role of these characters in forming the identity of the ideal readers' community. Thus, the non-Judean characters in the Gospel of Matthew have not been thoroughly studied from an identity-forming perspective.
- Most of the research conducted on the Gospel of Matthew in general, as well as on non-Judean characters in particular, has been from the perspective of historical-critical, literary-critical, socio-scientific, narrative critical, and other reading methods. The methodologies employed in past research focus either on the historicity and social situations in which the text was produced, or on the narrative world within the text, to find the meaning of the text (see 2.3.1). They do not explicate how the text was intended to be received by its implied readers. Therefore, a methodology that fills this gap is necessary.

- Until now, most studies have focused on the non-Judean characters as reflecting the actual composition of the Matthean community. This study assumes they were included by Matthew to shape the identity of new, potential communities, comprised of Judeans and non-Judeans. It does not assume that these communities already existed when Matthew wrote his gospel.

### **1.2.3. Anticipated contribution**

The purpose of the study is to fill the knowledge gap regarding the role of the non-Judean characters in the Matthean narrative in forming the identity of the ideal readers' community. Most of the previous studies conducted on the non-Judean characters in the Matthean narrative, were from the viewpoint of addressing issues related to the extension of the mission to non-Judeans, or attempting to reconstruct the existing community behind the Gospel of Matthew. This study, however, will argue that the inclusion of the non-Judeans in the Matthean narrative has an identity-forming role. It will investigate the role of the Gospel of Matthew, particularly stories related to non-Judeans, in redefining the identity of the beneficiaries of the messianic blessings; the people of God who are depicted in the Gospel of Matthew as reconstituted Israel (cf. 5.4.6 and 5.4.7). This is a potential community that accepts the ideology propagated by the implied author of Matthew. Therefore, this study will be done from this perspective to contribute to filling this lacuna in Matthean scholarship.

Furthermore, it aims to solve the tension created by the implied author in the positive and negative depictions of non-Judeans by showing that this is the author's means of forming the identity of the ideal reader's community. Most scholars' studies in the past have considered the characterisation of non-Judeans as either a reflection of the reconstructed Matthean community or the author's attitude towards the non-Judeans (see 2.3). However, this study will argue that both the positive and negative characterisation of non-Judeans in the Matthean narrative are literary tools used by the implied author to form the social identity of the ideal readers' community as reconstituted Israel and beneficiaries of the messianic benefits.

Though Matthean scholarship has recognised the representational role of the non-Judean characters in the narrative, it lacks a theoretical framework by which it reaches its conclusion. Therefore, the research will attempt to make a significant contribution to filling this lacuna in Matthean scholarship by providing a theoretical framework that helps the scholarly community

to better grasp and explicate the representational role of non-Judean characters in constructing the identity of the readers' community. I will argue that specifically Barthes' semiological reading method provides a theoretical framework through which we can understand the representational role of positively depicted non-Judeans in the Matthean narrative. This theoretical framework will emerge from the reading methodology, which this study describes as a "socio-narrative reading", which will be developed by merging narrative criticism, a semiological reading of the narrative, and a socio-scientific reading of the text.

Thus, as no specific study has to date focused on how the author of the gospel utilised the non-Judean characters in the Matthean narrative to shape the identity of its ideal readers' community as an envisioned 1<sup>st</sup>-century Christian community, the research will also contribute to filling this void in the area of Matthean scholarship through a socio-narrative reading.

### **1.3. Research question**

The main research question of this study is: Why does the author of the Gospel of Matthew include non-Judean characters in his narrative?

#### **1.4.1 Subsidiary questions**

Secondary questions are:

- (1) How does the implied author of the Gospel of Matthew use the non-Judean characters in the narrative to convey his ideology<sup>4</sup>?
- (2) How does the inclusion of the non-Judean characters within the narrative world of the Gospel of Matthew affect the identity of the ideal readers' community?

### **1.4. The presuppositions of the research**

The research presupposes the following:

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<sup>4</sup> I will show that the ideology of the author is the realisation of non-Judean inclusion into the ideal readers' community, the 1<sup>st</sup>-century Christian community. I will argue that the consequences of their legitimate inclusion as members of the community of God's people, was to change the social composition of this community and redefine its identity.

- I. The stories told in the Gospel of Matthew are historical narratives in the sense of reporting past events as understood by the author. However, they do not merely tell the reader what happened, but rather aim to create something in the present. The Gospel of Matthew thus has an impact on the ideal readers.
- II. The gospels are ideological documents that were carefully constructed to shape the identity of the addressees.
- III. The Gospel of Matthew, as is the case with all narratives, is a symbolic act (Jameson, 1985; Wess, 1987:69-78) that aimed to provide a solution for the social and cultural problems of the intended readers.
- IV. The Gospel of Matthew was written to a wider audience of the Christian community in the 1<sup>st</sup> century with the intent of having a formative impact on its readers.
- V. The author of the Gospel of Matthew considered the members of the ideal readers' community to which the gospel was addressed, as a true expression of Israel. He, therefore, constructed their identity using the Judean traditions. In this community, contrary to contemporary Judean communities, non-Judeans were included.<sup>5</sup>
- VI. Though the research is not directly concerned with the dating of the Gospel of Matthew, it assumes that it was written within the 1<sup>st</sup>-century socio-cultural milieu. It accepts the presence of uncertainty in this milieu regarding the acceptance of non-Judeans. In this era, the fate of the non-Judeans upon the coming of the Messiah, was disputed. Important issues were whether they would be included in the kingdom he would bring, who would be members of the kingdom, and who would benefit from the blessings in the kingdom. Therefore, this study will assume the Gospel of Matthew was written to address some of the issues in the 1<sup>st</sup>-century context.

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<sup>5</sup> This study uses the term community to refer to the group to which the gospel was addressed—a group portrayed by the implied author in terms of trans-ethnic identity and depicted as neither Judean nor non-Judean. However, the author defined their identity in terms of Judean traditions.

## 1.5. Hypothesis

This study wishes to further the thesis that in the context of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, when there was an expectation that non-Judeans would pass through a proselytisation process to be partakers of the messianic blessings,<sup>6</sup> the fate of non-Judeans was disputed regarding their relationship to the Messiah, who came to restore Israel. In this context, the implied author on the one hand characterises non-Judeans stereotypically in a negative way in Jesus' teaching. This negative stereotypical depiction of non-Judeans is exemplified through the implied author's negative characterisation of individual non-Judeans, such as the Gadarenes, Pilate, and the Roman soldiers. On the other hand, the author also positively characterised non-Judean characters, such as the four non-Judeans in the genealogy account, the Magi, the centurion, and the Canaanite woman, to show that non-Judeans were authorised beneficiaries of the messianic benefits. Therefore, this study will argue that while the stereotypically negative characterisation of non-Judean in Matthean narrative are aimed in forming the outside boundary of the Ideal readers' community, these positively depicted narrative characters are not just examples or a foreshadowing of the inclusion of non-Judeans into the community, neither are they the reason for the inclusion of non-Judeans into the community. Their function in the narrative exceeds justifying the presence of non-Judeans in the community. Rather, they represent the full realisation of the messianic expectations; they are the means through which the implied author reshaped the identity of the community that would benefit from the messianic blessings. They are the ideological manifesto of the implied author. If non-Judeans are also the rightful beneficiaries of the messianic benefits, the beneficiaries' identity is clearly redefined, the identity of the community is reshaped, and the relationship between Judeans and non-Judeans is negotiated. Consequently, the implied author used these characters to form the identity of the ideal readers' community.

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<sup>6</sup> Because it was assumed that the coming of the Messiah was for Judeans, the messianic blessings were seen as being only for those who belonged to their group. If non-Judeans wished to partake in these messianic blessings, they had to become part of this group by undergoing a conversion ritual.



## 1.6. Methodology

This study will make use of a new approach that can be described as a “socio-narrative reading”. It is an integrated approach that merges socio-scientific criticism and narrative criticism using sociological theory. It will specifically use social identity construction theory, narrative theory, Barthes’ semiological reading theory, Burton Mack’s mythmaking, and Seymour Chatman’s open character narrative theory which will be discussed in the third chapter of this study. Narrative criticism will help with the study of the narrative world of the non-Judean characters and how the implied author characterised them in the narrative; socio-scientific criticism and its social identity construction theory will assist with analysing the social norms of the narrative world as a heuristic tool; and the structural reading of myth, specifically Barthes’ semiological reading, will clarify how the implied author intended those stories to be received by the implied readers. The above-mentioned three reading methods together will put us in a better position to see how the implied author used the non-Judean characters in the narrative to shape the identity of the ideal readers’ community (see Chapter Three).

## 1.7. Limitation/delimitation of the research

The Matthean narrative includes various non-Judean individuals or groups, including those in the genealogy account (Matt. 1:1-17), the Magi (Matt. 2:1-12), a centurion (Matt. 8:5-13), the Gadarenes (Matt. 8:32-34), the Canaanite woman (Matt. 15:21-28), Pilate (Matt. 27:1-6; 27:62-66), and a group of Roman soldiers (Matt. 27:27-28:15). The focus of this study will be on analysing the above-mentioned texts in which individual non-Judean figures are mentioned and passages in which the author explicitly or implicitly attributed certain characteristics to the non-Judeans (i.e., Matt. 5:47; 6:7; 6:32; 18:17; and 20:19), which I will argue have a bearing on the identity formation of the ideal readers’ community. Though there are other non-Judean characters in the Gospel of Matthew, i.e., the story of the centurion and the soldiers with him at the cross (Matt. 27:54), which I argue have a similar effect<sup>7</sup> on implied readers as the other

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<sup>7</sup> I will argue this story has a similar role in forming the identity of the ideal readers’ community. Though the story of the centurion and the soldiers with him in Matt. 27:54, according to Barthes’ first order semiological reading, has meaning related to their acknowledgement of Jesus’ messianic identity, I argue that the second order meaning of the story is related to forming the identity of the ideal readers’ community. For, as I will argue in Chapter Four (see specifically 4.2), the non-Judeans are depicted in Jesus’ teaching as those who did not acknowledge the power of God; however, these soldiers, who were meant to guard Jesus, after seeing the whole incident, acknowledged and testified to the messianic identity of Jesus. Therefore, the secondary meaning of the story is that the non-Judeans will acknowledge and testify to the messianic identity of Jesus like the centurion and the soldiers with him. This is the significance of the story. Thus, the implied author used this signification of the story of the centurion

positively characterised non-Judeans mentioned in the Matthean narrative, the story is not linked to either their being beneficiaries of the messianic blessings or being the part of the community of which the members are legitimate beneficiaries of the messianic blessing. Therefore, it will not be addressed in this study. Other passages in the Gospel of Matthew are linked in one way another to non-Judean characters, such as Matt. 10:5-6 and 28:16-20. As a significant amount of work has been done on these passages by Matthean scholars from the perspective of the identity of the community, I will not deal with these passages.

## **1.8. Overview of chapters**

In Chapter Two, I will overview the history of research by Matthean scholars endeavouring to investigate the relationship between the Gospel of Matthew and its role in forming the identity of the community it addresses. Then, I will discuss the methodologies previously used by scholars in search of the community identity and their conclusions on the function of the Gospel of Matthew. I will address the need for an integrative approach to address the research question stated in Chapter One.

This will lead to the development in Chapter Three, where I will explicate the methodology employed in this study—a socio-narrative reading method which merges narrative criticism and socio-scientific approach through various theories, such as the social identity construction theory, narrative theory, and Barthes' semiological reading theory.

The focus of Chapter Four will be on investigating the negatively stereotypical depiction of the non-Judeans in the Matthean Jesus' teaching, which are exemplified in the stories of the Gardarenes (Matt. 8:28-34), Pilate (Matt. 27:1-26; 27:62-66), the Roman centurion, and the soldiers around the cross (Matt. 27:27-28:15). This chapter will show how the implied author used the negative stereotypical portrayal of non-Judeans to shape the identity of the ideal readers' community, by distinguishing the ideal readers' community from surrounding non-Judeans. Unlike the non-Judeans who are portrayed positively (see chapter 5-8), they do not

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and the soldiers, who acted contrary to the general characterisation of non-Judeans, to form the identity of the ideal readers' community, i.e., not only Judeans but also non-Judeans acknowledged the messianic identity of Jesus. However, this story is different from the other stories in which non-Judeans are positively characterised (see Chapter Five; Chapter Six; Chapter Seven; and Chapter Eight) in the sense that the story was not written in the context of their benefiting from or being legitimate beneficiaries of the messianic blessings. Therefore, this story is not included in the study.

have symbolic representational value and will thus not be analysed using Barthes' semiological reading method.

From Chapter Five to Eight the attention will be on investigating the positive portrayals of non-Judeans in the Matthean narrative, such as in the four non-Judeans in Matthew's genealogy (Matt. 1:1-17), the Magi (Matt. 2:1-12), the centurion (Matt. 8:5-13), and the Canaanite woman (Matt. 15:21-28), by the implied author to form the identity of the ideal readers' community. These chapters will show how the positively depicted non-Judeans were used by the implied author to reshape the composition of this community and determine who would be the beneficiaries of the messianic blessings.

In the final chapter all the chapters will be summarised; the research question will be revisited to confirm if it has been addressed; a final conclusion(s) will be presented; and suggestions will be made for further areas of research and study.

## **Chapter Two**

### **2. History of research**

#### **2.1. Introduction**

A project like this, which deals with the role of the text to shape the identity of the reader, has to commence with the questions whether such a reader can be identified, the genre of the literature, and the purpose of the literature. Matthean scholars have put enormous effort into seeking answers to these questions. However, the efforts are mainly related to the assumed community behind the production of the Gospel of Matthew, which enables scholars to construct a historical matrix against which they might read the gospel. Thus, a significant amount of research has been done on the Gospel of Matthew to analyse the nature of the “Matthean community” from the perspectives of historical criticism, literary criticism, socio-historical and socio-scientific reading methods, and narrative criticism.

Before briefly overviewing the different methodologies used in Matthean studies, I will trace some of the work that has been done on the Gospel of Matthew with regards to identity formation, before surveying major methodologies that have a direct or indirect impact on the study of the community to which the gospel was addressed.

#### **2.2. History of research on identity formation and the Gospel of Matthew**

Matthean scholars have made various attempts to determine the role of the gospel in shaping the identity of the Matthean community. John K. Riches (2000), for example, considers the “Gospels as evidence for a Christian sense of identity”. In the first chapter of the book, he addresses the issue of “identity and change” with the turn of the era, kinship, and sacred space as key identity factors (Riches, 2000:1-20). In Chapter Two he describes Jewish identity in relationship with kinship, decadence, and sacred space in the Mediterranean cities (Riches, 2000:21-68). He then discusses the topic of identity formation in the Gospel of Mark, before moving on to address the issue of self-identification in Matthew in the light of emerging rabbinic Judaism. He analyses the self-identification of the community from the perspective of kinship language (Riches, 2000:181-228) and then examines the way the community identified themselves in the light of sacred space (Riches, 2000:115-141), and cosmology and Christology from the perspective of sacred space (Riches, 2000:262-296). The final chapter is his

conclusion. Overall the author uses a historical-cultural anthropological reading method<sup>8</sup> with the support of redaction criticism as a heuristic tool and contends that the identity of the early Christian groups emerged from of a dynamic process of reshaping the Jewish tradition which is related to kinship and descent, on the one hand, and senses of sacred space, on the other hand, which were closely tied to descent from Abraham and Jewish parents and to a sense of attachment to the land (Riches, 2000).

F.P. Viljoen (2012:254-276) contends that, after the destruction of the Temple, there was fragmentation and rivalry within Jewish society. Therefore, Matthew used his interpretation of the Torah as a means through which the community could defend the separation of the community. He treats the Gospel as a “transparent story”, which reflects the social situation of the community it was written for. The narrative of the gospel, in addition to narrating the life of Jesus, also reflects the situation of its community. It serves as “a window through which one could picture the community in which the gospel was created and for whom it was intended” (Viljoen, 2012:254-276). Thus, the author’s version of an interpretation of the Torah is related to the identity of the community.

Viljoen (2013:1-10) further contends that the gospel played an identity forming role. The intentional use of the term “righteousness” in Matt. 5-7 demonstrates that the theme of “righteousness” served as the identity marker of the community; righteousness is defined as a proper norm by which the community is distinguished from the others.

According to Viljoen (2014:214-237), the author used the stories in Matt. 9:9-13 and 12:1-14 to build the identity of his community. In both passages the author of the gospel used Hos. 6:6 to show what God desires, is mercy. Viljoen states that “if one wants to adhere to God’s will, one should learn to recognize the steadfast love of God for his people as is taught and enacted by Jesus” (Viljoen, 2014:232). He argues further that the social location of its community is reflected in the gospel, which was experiencing conflict with the Pharisaic society after 70 B.C.E. (Viljoen, 2014:232). Therefore, it was used to construct the identity of his community and to legitimise their manner of living. The gospel portrays Jesus as a prototype of

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<sup>8</sup> Though he claims he used the historical cultural anthropological method, his methodology lacks comparison of cultures, which is the main feature of cultural anthropological studies.

the Matthean community, whom they should imitate, and who was also in conflict with the religious leaders regarding adherence to the Law (Viljoen, 2014:214-237).

Thomas C. Fraatz (2010) used social conflict, formation, and change of identity theories to study the identity-forming role of the Gospel of Matthew. As opposed to Viljoen, Fraatz contends that the main clash between the Matthean community and the Pharisaic community was not on Pharisaic *Halakah*, but rather that the Pharisaic community rejected the distinctive feature of the Matthean community—their belief that “Jesus is the Jewish Messiah”. Therefore, “the identity of the Matthean Jewish community is negotiated at the breaking point of this intra-Jewish conflict” (Fraatz, 2010:8). He states that

Matthew constructs a narrative for his community that explicitly links their suffering to the death of their founder. By anachronistically inserting the Pharisees into his gospel as active opponents of Jesus, Matthew can argue that just as the Pharisees contributed to the warrantless execution of the Messiah, Matthew’s Pharisaic opponents are unjustly persecuting the Matthean community. (Fraatz, 2010:13)

Warren Carter (2004b) uses a counter-narrative reading perspective and contends that the Gospel of Matthew, in addition to its historicity, is a means through which the identity of its community was shaped. He considers the gospel as a work written to encourage the disciples of Jesus Christ, who were a minority, to resist the influence of both the Roman Empire and the Jewish synagogue in the light of their anticipation of the reign of God. Carter identifies some devices that the ancient Greco-Roman world used to define themselves and the out-group in the Gospel of Matthew. Identifying these similar devices, he demonstrates how the Gospel of Matthew formed the identity of the community (Carter, 2004b:9-11). Furthermore, using socio-scientific heuristic tools, Carter analyses the socio-political situation of its 1<sup>st</sup>-century audience to show how the narrative of the gospel was “from and for a minority community of disciples of Jesus”. Though Carter in his commentary rightly recognises the struggle the community was facing with Roman imperial might as well as the Jewish synagogue, and identifies the role of the gospel in forming the identity of the community (Carter, 2004b), he does not bring into consideration the role of the internal dynamics of the community in developing its marginal stances.

Other scholars, such as Philip F. Esler (2015), Dennis C. Duling (1995), and Anthony J. Saldarini (1994:197) assess the identity-forming process of the community using socio-scientific theories and argue that it was a kind of “voluntary association”.

Laura Feldt (2015:163-192) uses social space and narrativity theories to investigate and analyse Torah wilderness mythology and how those myths were received and transformed in the New Testament. Specifically, Feldt focuses on “the impact of the Torah wilderness space on religious identity formation in the Gospel of Matthew” (Feldt, 2015:164). Thus, the First Gospel formed the identity of the followers of Jesus in two ways: first, the “Torah wilderness” was used in the narrative to affirm that Jesus was the heir of the deity depicted in the Old Testament; and second, it also modelled the life and practice of Jesus’ followers as “an itinerant ‘wilderness’ existence”. Therefore, Feldt contends the theme of wilderness played a major role in forming the identity of Jesus’ followers (Feldt, 2015:163-192).

Richard T. Martin (1996:20-32) maintains that in his gospel the author reflected “Jewish hostility” towards his community and legitimised his community as a legitimate covenant community (Martin, 1996:20). However, it is hard to attest to such a debate without evidence, specifically from the Jewish counterpart. Therefore, the evidence is one-sided. Martin argues that the author characterised the Jews as “evil”, presented his community as a separatist movement, portrayed “Jesus’ morality in bipolar exclusive terms”, and used a “fulfilment” mode of interpretation of Jewish scripture (Martin, 1996:20).

Matthew’s appropriation of Jewish scripture into his interpretive framework not only acts to legitimate the Jesus movement along the line of the Jewish tradition but also, and perhaps even chiefly, serve as a polemical device by which Matthew wishes for his community to achieve a certain ascendant political position over the Jewish gathering in his vicinity. (Martin, 1996:23)

Thus, he argues, writings like the Gospel of Matthew have a political ideology that shaped the identity of the community (Martin, 1996:20- 32).

Minkyu Lee (2015) examines how the breaking of the bread as a “metaphor” in Matthew was designed to reveal identity and the ideology of the community. Lee claims that the author of the gospel used the breaking of the bread as a metaphor, not only to show

the community's link with the indigenous religious heritage, but also how a new alternative identity was established, which would overtake the previous religious, ethnic, and gender class. Therefore, Lee argues, in the 1<sup>st</sup>-century context, the author of the gospel used "the metaphor of bread" as a rhetorical device to present for the Matthean community an alternative ideology that extended beyond the existing socio-religious boundaries (Lee, 2015).

## **2.3. History of research on the Matthean community**

### **2.3.1. The quest for the Matthean community: Research methodology**

Researchers have used a variety of theoretical frameworks to explore the Gospel of Matthew for over a century. Although it is impossible to outline every technique used, in this section I will endeavour to cover the most widely recognised strategies which have been used in association with community and identity studies. The aim of this section is to show that the most of past Gospel scholarship have focused on constructing the community behind the text, therefore, in due course the role of the text was often ignored.

#### ***2.3.1.1. Historical-critical method***

This method attempts to be an objective and scientific way to construct the historical situation related to the gospel materials. Four different aspects of historical-critical research are: source criticism, form criticism, redaction criticism, and socio-scientific criticism.

##### *a) Source criticism*

Source criticism, especially in regard to the synoptic gospels, is an attempt to understand the interdependence of the gospels and to trace the sources of the biblical materials (Koch, 1996:162). Before the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the study of the gospels was dominated by a dogmatic approach. The end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century marked a change in understanding of the nature and the literary association of the canonical gospels, especially the synoptic gospels (Streeter, 1924). The interrelationship between the gospels had already been identified by Augustine of Hippo (335-430), who argued that the Matthew is the earliest of all gospels and Mark is the shortest form of this gospel and the others are dependent on these earlier gospels. But in the 19<sup>th</sup> century,



with the help of source criticism, very different proposals were suggested regarding the interrelationship of the synoptic gospels.

Among the source-critical scholars, Karl Lachmann was the first to propose the priority of the Gospel of Mark; however, he acknowledges no interdependence between the first three gospels, because, according to Lachmann, they all used an earlier oral source. According to him, the Gospel of Mark is the one that followed the order of events in these earlier sources the closest (Lachmann, 1935:570).

Source critic B.H. Streeter, regarding the origin of the gospels, proposed a four-document hypothesis, in which he contends that the Gospels of Matthew and Luke used additional older resources, M and L respectively, in addition to the Gospel of Mark and Q (Streeter, 1924). Thereafter, the main scholarly endeavour of source criticism revolved around an attempt to identify the older sources so that the origin of the history of Jesus could be traced scientifically.

However, source critics such as William Wrede (1971), Wilhelm Wrede (1963:130), Albert Schweitzer (1912), and others soon recognised that even the oldest material like the Gospel of Mark would not lead them back directly to the earthly life of Jesus, because the Gospel of Mark is not merely a historical book, rather, it harmonises historical and dogmatic elements. Therefore, they urged scholars to focus on the impact of the community on the making of Mark. Source-critical scholars contend that the reason behind the recognition and canonisation of the four gospels was that each gospel must have been written for its specific community. For instance, B.H. Streeter argues that “the Gospels were written in and for different churches, and that each of the Gospels must have attained local recognition as a religious classic if not yet an inspired scripture before the four were combined into a collection recognized by the whole church” (Streeter, 1924:12). The recognition of the theological influence of the early churches on materials such as Mark, Q (German *Quelle*—source), Luke, and Matthew and the inability of source criticism to provide an unbiased historical source for Jesus’ earthly life, which they thought would enable them to discover the actual history of the earthly Jesus, led them to develop a new method of reading the gospels, i.e. form criticism.

Though the primary goal of source criticism is to investigate the literary interdependence of the materials, scholars in this field of study have recognised the need to consider the

community behind the composition of the materials. Therefore, this method is not much help in examining the part text plays in forming the identity of the ideal readers' community in front of the text.

*b) Form criticism*

Form criticism is a systematic analysis of the form and content of earlier Christian literature, using scientific, historical, and theological methods (Doty, 1972:62). Karl Ludwig Schmidt, though he accepted the conclusion of source criticism that Mark is the earliest gospel and Matthew and Luke used this gospel in addition to other earlier traditions, concludes that even in Mark itself we find the interest of the writer. Therefore, he argues, since independent units in the Gospel of Mark show these traditions, they were collected by the early church for their own polemic, mission, and other church needs. According to him, the individual units were handed down in oral form; these units were collected and preserved by the early church because they met the needs of the community (Dibelius, 1934). Thus, early Christian writing was often related to the needs of the community.

Though Schmidt studied the gospel traditions within the framework of the gospels themselves, he did not use form criticism. He argues that it is possible to reduce the main units of the gospel to short narratives on which the framework of the gospel is imposed. But this assumption is challenged by C.H. Dodd, who contends that the order of the units is random and the framework which holds together the units was built artificially (Dodd, 1953:3). On the other hand, T.W. Manson also contests the idea that the church created the traditional units to serve its own need; he argues that they preserved the traditions because of their respect and love for their hero (Manson, 1962:6).

Martin Dibelius was the first scholar to use the form-critical method for gospel studies. By reconstructing and analysing the source of traditions, Dibelius aimed to access the era before the gospel materials were written (Dibelius, 1953:iii). Similarly, Bultmann hoped to discover "what the original units of the synoptic were, both sayings and stories, to try to establish what their historical setting was, whether they belonged to a primary or secondary tradition or whether they were the product of editorial activity" (Bultmann, 1963:1-3).

Form criticism has three presuppositions, namely (1) the existence of earlier traditions,

individual sayings, and isolated stories, which were assembled and connected by editors (Bultmann, 1963:5); (2) the primary goal of these traditions was to serve the needs of the community, therefore, it is possible to reconstruct the synoptic tradition by studying the early community (Dibelius, 1953:30-31); and (3) it is possible to classify the materials into forms, which makes it possible to study the history of the traditions (Dibelius, 1953:13-14; Bultmann, 1963:4).

Dibelius divides the gospel material into six literary forms: sermons (that indicate their social settings); paradigms (examples of early Christian preaching); tales (miracles); legends (stereotype models); passion stories; and myths (relating the cosmic significance of a cult hero). Of these six forms, Dibelius opines that the sermon is crucial, for it created the social setting of the gospel traditions. He argues that each gospel tradition was formed in and for its own *Sitz im Leben*. Therefore, for a proper reading of the gospels, the social location of the traditions, the *Sitz im Leben*, should be described appropriately (Dibelius, 1934:7). He defines *Sitz im Leben* as the social and historical layers in which the literary forms were constructed. He believes the biblical materials were constructed in church settings with the primary purpose of evangelism and polemic, and as messianic proof of the identity of Jesus.

The primary goal of form criticism is to identify the social location of the textual units. Form criticism treats the gospels as a collection of preaching traditions (Dibelius, 1934:7). However, K.L. Schmidt and Rudolf Bultmann reject Dibelius' proposal of evangelistic preaching as a basis for the collection of stories. Firstly, they considered it too simplistic, and secondly, they argue that there is a significant presence of un-evangelistic traditions in the gospels. Bultmann argues that the gospel traditions should rather be divided into two categories: (a) Jesus' sayings linked to a certain situation, including polemical sayings and sayings in relation to *logia*, prophetic and apocalyptic words, legal sayings, church rules, and so on; and (b) narratives sayings, which include miracles stories with the purpose of demonstrating Jesus' messianic or divine authority and stories that emerged from messianic hope (Bultmann, 1968:69-179). Therefore, Bultmann argues that the polemic and apologetic tendency of the gospel tradition shows that the gospels are the *kerygma* of the early churches written in expanded and illustrated forms.

However, other scholars like Harald Riesenfeld and Birger Gerhardsson contest the view that the contemporary situations of the church, which are reflected in the sermons, polemical

sayings, catechetical teachings, etc. were the sources of gospel tradition. Based on the origin and transmission of Jewish tradition, they contend that the source of “the Gospel tradition lies with Jesus himself” (Riesenfeld, 1957:23; cf. Gerhardsson, 1961:19). Riesenfeld argues that the community considered the tradition as a new Torah; therefore, it came directly from Jesus himself (Riesenfeld, 1957:19).

According to form critics, the gospels are a collection of oral traditions in the form of popular folk literature within a specific locality and the writers of the gospels should not be considered as authors, but as compilers or redactors, whose main goal was grouping the traditional materials.

Generally, Bultmann and Dibelius argue that the nature of the gospels themselves makes writing a biography of Jesus impossible. They argue that the community in which those traditions were formed, was not mainly concerned with Jesus’ biography and thus did not hand down the life of Jesus in chronological order. Rather, they handed down separate sayings and narratives of Jesus, except the passion narratives. Therefore, these traditions were formed by a community for its own purpose.

Like source criticism, form criticism contends that the gospels were produced in a specific social location and for a specific community. According to form criticism, the gospels are a window through which the social location of the particular community can be viewed. It links the nature of the gospel itself with the community settings and argues that the gospels were not written by individuals, but were produced within the community and served as a cult legend in the society. There were no individual authors behind the texts and the role of the gospel writers was restricted to collecting individual sayings or preaching. Therefore, the primary goal of form criticism is to determine the social and historical situation of every saying or pericope in the early Christian community. Form criticism, like source criticism, does not help examine the role of the final text of the completed gospel, and thus, specifically the role of non-Judean characters in the Matthean narrative, in forming the identity of the ideal community.

#### *c) Reduction criticism*

The attempts at reconstructing the social setting of the gospels are not the concern solely of those who use form criticism; they are also advocated and even emphasised to a greater extent

by scholars who use redaction criticism. The term redaction criticism is a translation of a German word, *Redaktionsgeschichte*, which was first introduced to gospel studies by Willi Marxsen, who divided the social setting into three sections: the setting in which the event was performed; the historical situation of the primitive church; and the specific situation which led to the production of the gospels (Marxsen, 1969:21). In New Testament studies, the main emphasis of redaction criticism is to identify the author's distinctive usage of materials and its theological significance, to pinpoint the theological reason behind their writings, and to identify the social location, the *Sitz im Leben*, from which the materials were written (Stein, 1996:647). This kind of gospel study was introduced by three prominent scholars, Günther Bornkamm (1963), Hans Conzelmann (1961), and Willi Marxsen (1969). The main goal of redaction criticism is to determine how the author used the form and content of the materials so that it is possible to know the extent of their involvement in collecting, editing, arranging, and composition activities.

Günther Bornkamm, Gerhard Barth, and Heinz Joachim Held, after comparing Matt. 8:23-27 with Mark 4:35-41, conclude that the author of Matthew reinterpreted the story of Mark, situated the story in a new context, and gave it a new meaning. This indicates that the author was an interpreter of preceding traditions and also that the interpreted traditions themselves depicted his theology and the purpose for which he wrote the gospel (Bornkamm, Barth and Held, 1963:53). Conzelmann also contends that these traditions, which contain the *kerygma* of the early church, were not transmitted and received unaltered from people to people and community to community; they were also the subject of reflection (Conzelmann, 1961:12). Marxsen, after contrasting form criticism and redaction criticism, claims that the task of redaction criticism is to find the *Sitz im Leben* of the writings and purpose of the evangelist (Marxsen, 1969:21).

Therefore, any redaction of Matthew is related to the intention of the author. The author was not just a collector of different traditions; according to Luz, he was “a bold composer, bringing tradition together to form completely new and unified compositions” (Luz, 2005:7). Thus, the redaction of the author is an indicator of the author's theology as well as the gospel's social location. It is possible for redaction criticism to identify the theology of the Gospel of Matthew as well as the social location of the addressed community. Therefore, the gospel serves as the window through which the author of the gospel expressed his theology as well as the

circumstances of his community. The gospels in general consist of transparent stories in which the authors of the gospels constructed the story of Jesus to illustrate the circumstances of their community (Luz, 2005:14-17, 238-240).

However, such a reading of a gospel as a window through which the social location of the community can be seen, has recently been challenged by scholars like Richard Bauckham and Richard Burridge, who argue that the gospels are not like epistles and were not written to address specific issues of a certain community; rather, they were intended to address a general audience (Bauckham, 1998a:48; Burridge, 1998:113-145). On the other hand, David Sim contends that even the identification of “the intended readers” would not narrow the gap in identifying the Christian communities to whom the gospels were written (Sim, 2001:17). Other Matthean scholars argue that, though the gospels are not like epistles, they express some contemporary issues which the authors wanted to deal with (Foster, 2004:3-6; Viljoen, 2006:242-243; Luz, 2005:14-17).

Though redaction criticism indeed identifies the role of the author in constructing the texts and is also a helpful tool for studying the social location of the Matthean community, Matthean scholars have not used this method to investigate what role the text played in forming the identity of the community to which the gospels were addressed.

#### *d) Socio-scientific approach*

Lately scholars, who use social-scientific methods to study the gospels, are also attempting to trace the social location of the gospels. Most of those who have dealt with the social location of the Matthean communities have focused “on the relationship between this group and the Jewish world, [...] the evidence strongly suggests that the evangelist’s community was in conflict with formative Judaism but not with Judaism proper; it continued to observe the Torah and defined its religious tradition as Judaism” (Sim, 2001:280).

After the 1960s, the application of the socio-scientific approach to New Testament scholarship expanded and was intensified by the publication of essays by Martin Hengel (1974) and Gerd Thiessen (1978). However, as David G. Horrell points out, even before the 1960s, scholars showed an awareness of the social location of the texts (Horrell, 2002:29-60). This interdisciplinary approach to the New Testament has two features. The first one mainly focuses

on describing the social and cultural issues reflected in the book and are considered a sociological approach. The other is socio-scientific criticism (Horrell, 2002; Pilch, 2008:5-12), which attempts to investigate the social milieu of the New Testament by using different theories and models extracted from the field of social sciences (Elliott, 2008:26-36). Therefore, according to this approach, the social location in which the books were written, need to be studied to understand the meaning of the texts.

Several studies with social-scientific critical lenses have contributed to our understanding of the gospels (Balch, 1991; cf. Esler, 1987). For instance, J. Andrew Overman (1990:16), using sociological exegesis, specifically focusing on sectarianism, contends that the Matthean community was a sect within the large body of Judaism, and Anthony J. Saldarini, by employing terminologies from contemporary social theories such as deviance, sectarianism, and kinship, also attempts to locate the social location of the Matthean community (Saldarini, 1994). On the other hand, Benedict T. Viviano (1990) uses a sociological theory of intragroup conflict to try to unpack the situation in the Matthean community. Jerome Neyrey explores the issues behind the gospels through theories of the “ideal reader” and outsider categorisation (Neyrey, 1991). Others have attempted to study the social context of the gospel using different themes, investigating issues such as “honor code” (White, 1988), “economics and household” (Crosby, 1988), “gender” (cf. Corley, 1993; Anderson, 1983:3-27), and “marginality” (Duling, 1995).

Though the main endeavour of socio-scientific criticism has been to discover either explicitly or implicitly expressed meaning in the text, this endeavour is similar to redaction criticism in its search for the social settings of the text. Elliott states that the meaning of the text is “made possible” as well as “shaped by” the social context (Elliott, 1993:8). Thus, scholars who are involved in gospel studies have used social-scientific critical methods as heuristic tools to widen our understanding of the gospels (Balch, 1991; cf. Esler, 1987).

One of the criticisms raised against the presupposition of socio-scientific criticism is that the gospels are not like epistles, in which the author dealt with the specific issue of a specific church. They are about Jesus. Furthermore, it is hard to identify specific social situations that are depicted in the gospels, for Matthean scholars are not on the same page regarding the social location of the addressed community (cf. Davies and Allison, 2004; Hagner, 1994:XXXV; Sim, 1998:53-62; Streeter, 1924:500-523; Gundry, 1994:609; Farmer, 1976:235-247; Kingsbury, 1988:152; Michael H. Crosby, 1988:37; Stark, 1986:314-329). Another objection against socio-

scientific criticism is that the methodology gives supremacy to the social context rather than the text itself. In other words, the methodology allows the social context to dictate the meaning of the text. As Foster rightly points out, the social context in which the gospels are situated can broaden our understanding of the text, but should not dictate the meaning of the text (Foster, 2004:12).

#### *e) Conclusion*

The historical-critical method was the dominant mode of reading the gospels for more than a century (Krentz, 1975). The main aim of the historical-critical reading of the Scripture is to gather information from the biblical texts about where, what, and when. It primarily focuses on the social location and the social background in which the text was produced (Elliott, 1990:2). Therefore, it uses background information of the text to interpret the text better. However, though the historical-critical method of reading the Scripture is a useful endeavour in understanding texts, it does not help to unpack the social dynamics of the biblical texts. In other words, it does not answer the questions of why and how the biblical text was produced (Elliott, 1989:3).

Though scholars have identified the strengths and weaknesses of each criticism, I have briefly shown that those methods have not yet been used to explore the role of the texts in community identity formation. Furthermore, one of the reasons for this failure, is that the above reading methods of the gospels have not considered the narrative nature of the gospels (Frei, 1974). Rather than reading the gospels as one story, historical-critical scholars search for the historical situations of the communities behind the texts.

#### **2.3.1.2. *Literary criticism***

##### *a) Narrative criticism*

In addition to the historical investigation of biblical materials, the need for considering the literary nature of texts has been suggested by historical-critical scholars such as William A. Beardslee and Dan O. Via (1970). They contend that the exploration of the form of a tradition not only informs us about the situation of the community in which the text was written, but it also gives insight into the literary significance and the influence of the text on the reader. Furthermore, they prove the necessity of considering the whole gospel form for a proper



understanding of the gospels; therefore, form-critical scholars should consider the literary features of the books (Beardslee and Via, 1970). This paved the way for the development of a new discipline called literary criticism, which treats the authors of the gospels like any other authors and borrows its methodology from non-biblical studies to analyse the texts (Perrin, 1972:370-371; cf. Tannehill, 1977; Crossan, 1973). In the initial stage of the development of literary criticism, some New Testament scholars used these suggestions to analyse the sayings of Jesus and particularly the parables (Beardslee and Via, 1970).

However, from the 1980s, the traditional method of reading the gospels began to change and a new method, narrative criticism, started to emerge (see Rhoads and Michie, 1982; Culpepper, 1983; Kingsbury, 1986; and Tannehill, 1986). This method employs a theory that is used by literary theorists to examine novels. For instance, Kingsbury uses the communication theory of Seymour Chatman and E.M. Forster to analyse the Gospel of Matthew (Kingsbury, 1986:10).

Literary criticism can be subdivided into five major areas of emphasis: structuralism (Patte, 1976:41-34); expressive, author-centred (rhetoric criticism); pragmatic, reader-centred (reader-response criticism); objective, text-centred (narrative criticism); and mimetic, historical (situation-centred) (Powell, 1990:11). However, most biblical studies have given major emphasis to text-centred (narrative criticism) and reader-centred approaches (reader-response criticism) (Powell, 1990:12).

The main characteristics of narrative criticism is that it lets the biblical literature function as any literature and it analyses the “how” (the rhetoric and structure) and “what” (the content) of the literature as a whole (Powell, 1992:3-19; Alter, 2011:3-22). While historical-critical scholarship involves discovering the meaning of the text and attempting to understand the social, cultural, and historical assumptions behind it, the main focus of narrative criticism is on the formal features of a text in its finished form. According to this approach, the narrative of the gospels could be considered as a mirror.

In the 1990s Matthean studies started to exhibit a paradigm shift in the way the gospel is viewed. For many years it was studied mostly using the historical method, although a few scholars also studied the gospel using literary criticism methods (Powell, 1990). According to literary criticism, the Gospel of Matthew is regarded as a unified literary product in itself (Porter

and Tombs, 1995:82). The literary elements of the gospel, such as plot, sub-plots, narrator, narrative point of view, implied author, implied reader, and characterisation, have been identified by scholars (Bauer, 1989; Howell, 1990; Powell, 1993; Kingsbury, 1988). Scholars who use this method, consider every element in the gospel as contributing to expressing the author's purpose (Viljoen, 2006:249).

Thus, the conflict between the addressed community and their contemporary form of Judaism was also studied through narrative criticism, and this unveiled how the author characterised the Jewish leaders in the gospel narrative (Kingsbury, 1987:57-73; Burnett, 1992:155-191). Some scholars who employed this method not only studied the conflict in the gospel, but also explored the role of the gospel itself in forming the identity of the community (Martin, 1996:20-23). After showing the deficiency of past Matthean scholarship, Martin contends that the gospel, rather than reflecting the antagonism between the Matthean and Jewish community, sets the stage of the debate. Its goal was to legitimise the community "by characterizing 'Jews' as flat, 'linguistic constructs'; by converting potentially transformative impulses into separatist ones; by positing Jesus' morality in bipolar, exclusive terms; and, above all, by engaging in a closed practice of Scriptural hermeneutics on a 'fulfillment' model" (Martin, 1996:20). Therefore, the Gospel of Matthew played a role in forming the identity of the community.

Though narrative criticism has treated the gospels as one story written by an individual author for a certain purpose and attempted to uncover the structural and rhetorical nature of the relevant gospel as well as its content, it has not often been used to examine the identity-forming effect of the texts in the implied readers. One of the reasons for this is that narrative criticism by its nature detaches itself from the actual audience to whom the text is addressed, and works with the text.

#### **2.4. History of research on the function of the Gospel of Matthew**

Matthean scholars have suggested various options regarding the function of the Gospel of Matthew. Ernst von Dubschütz, using stereotype terminologies and formula quotations that are found in the gospel, points out its catechistical function. From this catechistic nature of the gospel, he deduces the author was a "converted Jewish Rabbi", who used his skill to produce a catechism for his Christianity community (Dubschütz, 1983:19-29). However, Krister Stendahl,

based on information gathered from the gospel, criticises this catechistic nature of Matthew. He contends that it should be understood as the expression of a school that followed a certain kind of “milieu and instruction” (Stendahl, 1968:29). He argues that, just as the synagogue served as a worshipping and teaching centre for the Jewish people, the church served as the place of worship and teaching for Christians; thus, the author of the gospel was their rabbi. P.H. Carrington also speaks of the supposed Matthean school which was organised in the pattern of contemporary Jewish schools (Carrington, 1940:69). The Gospel of Matthew would have been their manual around which the teaching and administration of this community revolved (Stendahl, 1968:33). Thus, according to him, the Matthean community was a school.

M.D. Goulder takes Dubschütz’s argument, that the author was a converted rabbi, further, contending that “he was a scribe, a provincial schoolmaster” (Goulder, 1974:5). He considers the Gospel of Matthew as a lectionary, arranged in the pattern of Jewish years. Furthermore, the scribal tendency of the author can be attested to by his commitment to the Torah, and his use and interpretation of the Scriptures (Goulder, 1974).

Other Matthean scholars who consider the Gospel of Matthew as a liturgical book, include G.D. Kilpatrick (1946:8-36), who carefully analysed how the author of the gospel used his sources, such as Mark, Q, and M. He contends that the author was probably given the mission of producing better liturgical material than what had been used for church services for more than twenty years (i.e. Mark, Q, and M) (Kilpatrick, 1946:59-71). According to Kilpatrick, this can be deduced from the fact that the gospel tends to abbreviate, adding details to make its stories clearer, using antithesis and parallels, very repetitive quotation formulas, and other marks (Kilpatrick, 1946:72-101). Regarding the community in which the gospel was produced, he argues it is natural that when the community was using Mark, Q, and M in their sermons and readings, their usage was coloured by the social location. Therefore, the contemporary situation of the community had an impact on the gospel itself. After cautiously examining the relationship between the community and Judaism, he concludes that the community which was responsible for the production of this gospel, was a Jewish Christian community in the tradition of Talmudic Judaism, which, after the destruction of the Temple, attempted to redefine itself in the light of the new scenario. Overall, Kilpatrick argues that this gospel was produced by a person who was on a mission to produce a liturgical book that exceeded the existing ones and which also reflected and addressed the existing situation of the community (Kilpatrick, 1946:101).

In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries scholars started to recognise that the literary nature of the biblical gospels resembles that of the ancient Greco-Roman biography. For instance, C.W. Votaw argues that the gospels are legendary biographies of Jesus, similar to Plato's biography of Socrates and *The Saints, lives of Plotinus, Proclus, and Isidore* in which both historical truth and exemplary life of the prototypical person are presented (Votaw, 1970). David E. Aune also contends that the gospels were written in the pattern of ancient Greco-Roman biographies (Aune, 1987:46-67; cf. Hengel, 1983:223-224; Shuler, 1982).

However, in 1920 this trend began to change and scholars shifted to depicting the gospels as apostolic *kerygma* which were presented in the form of narrative (Dodd, 1970:47; Jeremias, 1963:13; Grant, 1957:37; Schweitzer, 1979:23). According to Bultmann, the mythical nature of the gospels is based on the fact that the gospels are not interested in the development of Jesus' life, his humanity; rather, they are intended to portray Jesus as the Son of God. The main characteristic of the ancient Greek-Roman biography, however, is the human as a developing subject. Therefore, the gospels are not like Greek-Roman biography, but distinct from any other kind of ancient genre, with a unique literary form (Bultmann, 1968). R.A. Burridge, in his study of the nature of the gospel, demonstrates how the gospel forms the identity of its community. He also contends that, like ancient Greco-Roman biographies, the main emphasis of the gospels, in general, is on Jesus, who is a prototype and who sets the values and norms of the community (Burridge, 1992:214). Therefore, the gospels had a role in forming the identity of their communities.

Warren Carter considers the gospels identity-forming narratives (Carter, 2004b:8). Carter argues that, because the gospels had a role in modelling the way of life for a community, their settings, and the focus around which the identity of the community revolved, they are "generally concerned with forming" the identity of the community and this identity revolves around their commitment to Jesus, "who is God's agent" (Carter, 2004b:7-8). He presupposes that the intended audience of the gospel knew the sacred Jewish texts as well as their traditions; therefore, the gospel formed the identity of its audience using those familiar texts and traditions (Carter, 2004b:14). Carter contends that Matthew formed the identity and the discipline of the community through naming it (Carter, 2004b:7-8).

Similarly, Judith Lieu makes an argument that the text played an important role in constructing the identity of the early Christian community. Like Carter, she argues that the identity which

the author of the gospel was attempting to create was not new, but rather a continued identity (Lieu, 2005:62). Therefore, the authors of the gospels re-interpreted the past stories and traditions so that they would fit the communities' current needs. In this way, the past stories of Jewish people were used to shape the present identity of the followers of Christ (Lieu, 2005:61).

The methodology employed by Carter and Lieu has certain methodological similarities with the one implemented in this study in terms of accepting that the gospels have a role in forming the identity of the implied readers, and also that the gospel writers re-interpreted the traditions to do so. However, the method used in this study is different, because it will not only state that the gospel writers re-interpreted the tradition to form the identity of readers, but it will go further to explore how the stories presented in the gospels were designed to be received by the implied readers using Barthes' semiological reading method as a heuristic tool.

## **2.5. The Gospel of Matthew and non-Judeans**

As discussed, above, most of the studies conducted on the Gospel of Matthew revolve around either community reconstruction and/or the impact of the socio-cultural context in which and for which it was written. However, the role of the text, specifically the non-Judean characters in the gospel, in shaping the identity of the community, is not fully addressed. This section will provide a concise survey of how the non-Judeans have been studied by Matthean scholars in the past twenty years.

David Sim is one of the prominent scholars in Matthean scholarship with regard to the discussions on non-Judeans. Most recent studies conducted on this subject interact with his work. Sim opposes the dominant view in Matthean scholarship regarding non-Judeans, i.e., Matthew had a positive attitude and mission to non-Judeans. He advances an argument that Matthew was written from a Judean perspective and has a negative attitude towards non-Judeans (see Sim, 1995:19-48; 1996:171-195; 1998:215-256; 2013:173-190). Furthermore, he contends that, though the Matthean community acknowledged the missional activities towards non-Judeans, they did not participate in such endeavours. He acknowledges the existence of non-Judeans in the community; however, he argues that they were obliged to undergo a proselytisation process, to observe the Torah, and be circumcised (Sim, 1995:43-46). His argument is mainly influenced by the social context and geographical location in which he situates the Gospel of Matthew—post 70 C.E., and in Syrian Antioch respectively. He contends

that the community that existed in such a social and political context would have considered non-Judeans as people to be avoided (Sim, 1995:30). Though some Matthean scholars, such as John P. Meier, similarly situate the Gospel of Matthew in Antioch, they reach a different conclusion (Meier, 1983:41-65).

In addition to the socio-political context in which Sim situates the Gospel of Matthew, he claims that the apparent tension between the negative depiction of the non-Judeans in the gospel and the two commissions (cf. Matt. 10:4-5; 28:19-20) are wrongly understood by most Matthean scholars and should be seen as a reflection of the stance of the community. Firstly, he points out that the negative portrayal of non-Judeans has not received much attention (Sim, 1995:25). Furthermore, Matthean scholars' ascription of the negative portrayal of the non-Judeans in the gospel to the traditions, is rejected by Sim on the basis of the fact that "each practice, revision or retention of the source material is a redactional procedure in its own right and each contains important information about Matthew's interest and concerns" (Sim, 1995:28-30). Therefore, Sim contends that the apparent retention of the traditions in the gospel by the redactor affirms the community's negative stance towards non-Judeans (Sim, 1995:30).

Secondly, regarding the apparent contradiction in the passages known as Jesus' two commissions—"go nowhere among the Gentiles" and "make disciples of all nations"—Sim, like other Matthean scholars, recognises the difficulty of reconciling the passages (Hagner, 1990:249). Matthean scholars have made different attempts to solve this apparent contradiction. Studies on the origin of the Gentile mission show that Matthean scholars fall into four major camps in this regard: particularist, universalist, salvation-historical, and restorationist.

Some Matthean scholars identify with the particularist approach, taking sayings like 10:5-6 and 15:24 at face value and explaining away the presence of universalistic sayings in Matthew (Matt. 28:19) by labelling them as either eschatological, passive in character, or just written using tradition (see Harnack, 1908:37; Klausner, 1925:363; Jeremias, 1967:71; Sim, 1998:224; Oveman, 1990:411; Saldarini, 1994:68-69). David Sim uses the particularist texts to argue that the audience of the gospel was still *intra muros* of Judaism (Sim, 1998:242). He contends that the particularist passages could not have been manufactured by the church that was involved in the mission to non-Judeans and could not have added restrictive passages while engaging in a universal mission. Thus, Sim excludes the universalistic passages in the gospel as an addition of the later church. Furthermore, Sim argues that in the gospel the Gentiles are

excluded from being disciples of Jesus (Sim, 1998:224; Saldarini, 1994:82). In addition to rejecting the universalistic sayings as a later addition, those who hold the *intra muros* position of the Matthean church, regard Jesus' encounter with the Gentiles in the gospel as exceptional or peripheral.

Matthean scholars like J.A. Overman dismiss the universalistic implications of Jesus' commission of the disciples to all nations (28:18-20) on the basis that it referred to eschatological time, and was thus not actually related to the Matthean community (Sim, 1998:244; Overman, 1990:411). However, the kingdom of Heaven is depicted as already inaugurated in the ministry of Jesus (12:28). Thus, the gospel's audiences were already living in the eschatological period and in anticipation of the final consummation of the kingdom. This already-not yet tension, however, did not restrict the audience from being involved in the mission to non-Judeans. A.J. Saldarini contends that the position of the Great Commission shows the addressed community was not involved in the Gentile mission. The author of Matthew seems to have been urging this community to become involved in it (Saldarini, 1994:59-60). Saldarini's argument suggests that the author was setting the Gentile Mission as an agenda for a community not yet engaged in this task, thus separating the author from the audience to whom he was writing. Sim objects to this position and argues that if the author intended to urge a community that was not involved in Gentile mission, to engage in it, then he did a poor job, for there is no evidence to indicate that the community proceeded to engage in Gentile mission after the gospel was written to them (Sim, 1998:245).

Other Matthean scholars take the universalistic passages in the gospel as the core theme of the gospel and attempt to explain particularistic passages in one way or another (Park, 1995:7-8; Cook, 1983:142). Thus, according to those who ascribe to the universalist approach, the particularistic passages are either inauthentic (Hahn, 1965:40-44; Beare, 1970:1-13), temporary (Hooker, 1971:363), or were included because they formed a part of the tradition, which does not suggest that the ideas were necessarily accepted.

S. Brown, a proponent of the universalist approach, contends that the existence of particularist passages in Matthew demonstrates the social context of the community, and the author was forced to include the particularist passages in consideration of those in the community who held particularist positions (Brown, 1977:30; 1980:193-221). Yieh also argues for the existence of two opposite positions with regard to the Gentile mission (Yieh, 2004:267-



270). Brown's argument weakens the strength of the restrictive passages by "removing the unconditional character of Jesus' prohibition through the context in which he has placed it" (Brown, 1977:32).

Using the universalistic sayings, G.N. Stanton (1992) and P. Foster (2004) situate the Matthean community as *extra muros*. Stanton contends that the presence of the restrictive passages in the gospel do not reflect the present situation of the community, but belong to past history (Stanton, 1992:380). However, this solution does not answer the question, for everything in the gospel belongs to the author or the editor (Stanton, 1992:139). Foster, on the other hand, argues that the particularist passages in the gospel were included to appease those who adhered to the restrictive mission as an option that evaded endorsing or rejecting this position (Stanton, 1992:139). However, it is doubtful that Matthew could have successfully appeased them with just these passages if this was his intention.

The salvation-historical view has been developed by several scholars, including Craig Blomberg (1992), Ulrich Luz (2007), and R.T. France (2007). Blomberg argues that the exclusivity reflected in Matthew is due to a salvation-historical priority, much like Paul's assertion that the Gospel must go to the Jews first (Rom. 1:16). He says, "Perhaps the same solution to the particularist-universalist tension applies here; Jesus must first go to the Jews, and then he will move on to the Gentiles" (Blomberg, 1992:243). This view assumes that there were two missions, which were sequential and not simultaneous, one after the other in different dispensations. These two communities were Israel and the church (Gentiles). This definition can be fairly characterised by the separating and sequence of the mission to both groups. Against this, I would argue that Matthew portrayed Jesus as proclaiming the restoration of Israel, with non-Judeans as a part of this restoration.

John Nolland (2005), James LaGrand (1999), and Donald A. Hagner (1994) are the major proponents of the restorationist approach to the seemingly contradictory passages. Nolland argues that there was only one single mission, not two successive missions. The mission was to restore Israel, but that restored Israel would ultimately be extended to a universal mission that would include Gentiles.

Sim, using redaction criticism as his reading tool, contends that the gospel does not give us any clue about the abruption of the first mission to Israel; therefore, the salvation-historical



approach which upholds Jesus' final commission (cf. Matt. 28:19) as either a replacement or extension of the first commission, should be rejected using reduction criticism as reading tool (Sim, 1995:42-44; Brown, 1977:21-23). However, while other Matthean scholars, using the same reading method, consider the latter commission of Jesus as the position advocated by the redactor of the gospel based on the placement of the commission, Sim holds that the first commission is the view of the redactor and the community (Sim, 1995:19-48).

Brendon Byrne points out one of the pitfalls of Sim's argument: that rather than attempting to search for the role of the passage in the bigger framework, Sim often treats pericopes associated with non-Judeans in isolation (Byrne, 2002:57). Furthermore, as Olmstead notes, "Sim consistently reads the details of Matthew's story about Jesus as if they were transparent for life in the evangelist's community" (Olmstead, 2003:201).

On the other hand, Olmstead contends that in Matt. 21:28-22:14 the redactor of the Gospel of Matthew deliberately contrasted the non-Judeans, who are characterised positively in the parable, with the people of Israel, who are portrayed negatively.

The positive characterization of the Gentiles in deliberate and sustained contrast to Israel (or sub-groups within Israel) prepares the reader for the judgment that is about to fall on God's people and the blessing that awaits the nations. The Gentile sub-plot confirms this expectation, telling the story of the inclusion of all nations among God's people in fulfilment of his promises to Abraham. (Olmstead, 2003:96-97)

Senior also acknowledges that this theme of the inclusion of non-Judeans is central to this gospel. He states that Jesus' "initial hesitation" to share the messianic blessings, such as healing, with non-Judeans, reflects the reluctance and anticipation of the community to which the Gospel was addressed (Senior, 1999:19). Senior argues that the story of the centurion (Matt. 8:5-13) and the Canaanite woman (Matt. 15:21-28) are evidence that the author of the gospel was a supporter of non-Judean inclusion: "far from demonizing this type of opposition to the Gentile mission by having it represented by hostile Jewish leaders or wayward disciples, [Matthew] shows his respect for such hesitations and exercises an ingenious pastoral strategy by having such views voiced by Jesus himself" (Senior, 1999:19).

On the other hand, Byrne interprets the repetitive pattern of rejection encountered by Jesus from Jewish leaders and his withdrawal to “Galilee (Galilee of the Gentiles) and the Gentile regions of Tyre and Sidon” “as an anticipation of the final pattern whereby the rejection he suffers from his people in Jerusalem paves the way for a ‘withdrawal’ as risen Lord not merely to Galilee, but to the nations of the world” (Byrne, 2002:73; cf.).

## **2.6. The need for an integrative approach**

Source criticism concludes that the community played a role in forming the texts of the gospels. Therefore, gospel material will reflect the situation and beliefs of the churches or the community in which the gospel was composed. Furthermore, according to form criticism, the authors of the gospels are regarded as collectors of different traditions; its main goal is to investigate how the individual traditions come together. The primary focus of form criticism is to investigate the social and historical situation, the *Sitz im Leben*, in the early church, which made the formation and transmission of the individual traditions possible. However, redaction criticism holds that the authors of the gospels were real authors in their own right. Its main focus is to examine how the whole Gospel was written, to determine the role of the social and historical situation, and also attempt to determine the purpose of the individual gospels.

The central focus of narrative criticism is to examine issues located in the narrative world of the text. Though narrative criticism has treated the gospel as a one-unit literary form and its author as a mindful designer, its main feature does not allow it to investigate issues related to the actual readers. Therefore, the primary focus of narrative criticism is to investigate the implied reader, implied author, the narrative world, and the structure of the narrative.

As seen so far, most of the research conducted on the Gospel of Matthew has been done from the perspective of historical-critical (source and redaction criticism), literary-critical, or socio-scientific methods. Those who use the former method of reading Matthew generally, assume that it was written for a specific audience; therefore, as shown in the previous chapter, they mainly engage in community reconstruction (Klink III, 2007:2). To find the meaning of the text, these methods focus either on the historical and social situations behind the text or, as literary critics often do, on the narrative world of the text. Thus, either the social dynamics of the text or the narrative aspects of the gospels are often ignored in that they are not integrated with each other. Therefore, to solve this problem, it is necessary to integrate the two reading

methods. However, the real question is: Is it possible to combine these approaches? Both methods seem to work with completely different philosophical assumptions, that is, to look for meaning, one focuses on the textual world (narrative criticism) and the other on the world behind the text (historical-critical).

Furthermore, although sociological theories have in the last couple of decades been used by gospel scholars as heuristic interpretative tools to investigate the sociological environment of the gospels narrative, they presuppose some kind of relationship between the text and the socio-historical context in which the texts were produced. In these studies, the social sciences are mainly used either to construct the socio-historical background in which the texts were written or against which the text could be interpreted. The texts are thus considered to be a reflection of the “contextual history” (Petersen, 1985)<sup>9</sup> in which they were written. However, sociological studies on ancient societies through the use of texts, like studies on the Gospel of Matthew, are difficult, because the only way we know anything about the socio-historical environment, is through the text itself.

As Van Aarde (1988:237), for example, points out, the starting point for a sociological study of an ancient society, is the texts themselves. However, scholars have used the sociology of literature with different goals in mind. Since some study the social conditions of the text in order to inform their literary criticism, sociology is not the main interest of such investigations, rather it is the literature itself. Others study the sociological aspects of the literature to gather sociological information from the text which is otherwise inaccessible to the sociologist (Wolff and Routh, 1977:3-4). Still others see literature as a product of a society; therefore, literature is a symbolic representation of social reality. Some see literature as a social force that creates social change. Others argue that literature is both a product and a social force of society (Wolff and Routh, 1977:3-4).

However, since the biographical nature of the gospel has been accepted in gospel scholarship (see Talbert, 1977; Shuler, 1982; Aune, 1987), many scholars have rejected the notion that the gospels reflect the social conditions (context) of the audience (see Bauckham, 1998:28).

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<sup>9</sup> Here a clear distinction must be made between contextual history and referential history.

Though the notion that the gospel was addressed to a specific community or reflects the social situation of a specific community has recently been challenged by the thesis that the gospels were meant to be circulated widely (Bauckham, 1998:28), I argue that this notion does not affect the sociological study, particularly of identity formation, addressed in the narrative. This is because, though ancient biographies assume wider readership, the implied authors also made certain assumptions about how the implied readers would read the biographies. Assuming that the authors of the gospels used existing traditions about the historical Jesus and appropriated them in ways that suited their purpose, these appropriations of traditions were socially conditioned. As John Elliot (1990:4) rightly highlights “all ideas, concepts, and knowledge are socially determined”. Furthermore, for effective communication to take place, the implied author and the implied readers must have common assumptions; however, these assumptions are not explicitly stated. The only way we can know what the assumptions behind the text are, is by reconstructing the social world in which the text was written, through searching for existing pieces of evidence in the text and its contemporary social world using sociological theories as heuristic interpretive tools. Therefore, the biographical nature of the gospels does not necessarily annul the study of the gospel narratives through sociological theories.

## **2.7. Conclusion**

As discussed, the principal reading methods of the gospels in the past have been those that either place a strong emphasis on the formation of the texts or the narrative world of the text. However, every writing is coloured by the situation surrounding its writing, and the message (or messages) intended to be communicated to its readers. Thus, a reading methodology that encompasses both aspects of the gospel is deemed necessary.

Regarding identity formation, the literature review has shown that Matthean scholars have done a significant amount of work. However, they have not given enough attention to the change in the social dynamics of the early Christian community that the author of the Gospel of Matthew was addressing. The inclusion of non-Judeans into the community that the author of the Gospel was addressing triggered changes in the identity and norms of this community. Furthermore, how the author used non-Judean characters in the narrative to form the identity of the community, and who would become beneficiaries of the messianic blessings, need further investigation.

Besides, as seen, most of the research conducted concerning non-Judeans in Matthew focuses on attempting to reconcile the seemingly contradictory mission commands (cf. Matt. 10:1-6 and Matt. 28:18-19). The resolution provided often uses redaction criticism, thus, it goes behind the text to search for the socio-historical situation in which and for which the text was written. Though many efforts have been made to reconcile the seemingly ambiguous portrayal of non-Judeans in the Gospel of Matthew, not much emphasis has been given to the ideological intention of the implied author in the polarised characterisation of the non-Judeans in his narrative. This is because of the methodological emphasis these scholars placed on reconstructing the world behind the text with the presupposition that a proper understanding of the world in which the text was produced, enables them to extract the meaning the author intended to communicate to its addressees.

Though a lot of research has been done to investigate historical and social situations behind on the Gospel of Matthew as well as the narrative world of the text, a significant amount of research remains to be done to determine the role of the text in constructing the ideal identity of the society to which the gospel was addressed. Therefore, as methodological consideration, the relationship between the text and its social world needs to be addressed before we proceed further.

The question here is: How can texts like Matthew be used as a field of social investigation, specifically concerning the construction of social identity? Therefore, the next chapter will attempt to provide a perspective to elucidate the role of the gospels as narratives in constructing social identity. The perspective is called a socio-narrative reading of the gospels—an integrated approach that links socio-scientific criticism and narrative criticism through mythmaking and social identity formation theories. This will be the focus of the next chapter.

## Chapter Three

### 3. Socio-narrative reading of the gospels: Myth, mythmaking, and social identity formation

#### 3.1. Introduction

This chapter intends to develop an interpretative framework through which the role of the inclusion of the positively characterised non-Judean characters in the Matthean narrative, such as the four non-Judeans in the genealogy, the Magi, the centurion, and the Canaanite woman, as well as the stereotypical negative depiction of non-Judeans in Jesus' teachings that are exemplified in negatively characterised non-Judean characters<sup>10</sup> in forming the identity of the ideal readers' community, is explicated. It uses social identity construction theory, Roland Barthes' semiological theory, Burton Mack's mythmaking, and Seymour Chatman's open character narrative theory as interpretative heuristic tools.

In this research social identity construction theory is used to show the way the implied author constructed the identity of the Ideal readers' community by comparing them with the others, the non-Judeans in general. To construct this identity, I assume, the implied author wrote the Gospel of Matthew. Thus, in this research, the Gospel is considered as a myth that is intended to create the identity of its readers. Therefore, Mack Burton's theory of myth creation and identity formation fit here. However, the Gospel of Matthew, though it is a myth, which written to form the identity of the ideal community, it is not just fiction, rather it is written with historical references in consideration. Therefore, Seymour Chatman's open theory of character of the narrative explains this. Furthermore, Ronald Barthers' semiological reading method helps us to explicate the ideological intention of the implied author through this narrative. The above-mentioned theories and how they are used in the research will be explicated in the following sections.

First, an attempt will be made to briefly demonstrate the necessity for integrative approaches in New Testament studies, particularly in gospel scholarship. Second, the chapter

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<sup>10</sup> the Gardarenes, Pilate and the Roman centurion and the soldiers with him.

will endeavour to provide a sample of integrative approaches to New Testament studies, which could serve as a methodological guide for the current research. Third, an attempt will also be made to show how the provided working definition of myth fits with the current scholarly consensus among some Matthean scholars on the gospels' genre—ancient Greco-Roman biography—and how it may play a role in forming the social identity of a society (Talbert, 1977; Shuler, 1982; Aune, 1987). Fourth, a short survey of the scholarship on defining myth will be presented. This will provide a working definition of myth and its relationship with mythmaking and social identity formation. Finally, the three trajectories of socio-narrative reading—narrative criticism, semiological analysis, and social identity construction theory—will be explicated.

### **3.2. Previous attempts to merge narrative criticism and the sociological reading of a text with Barthes' semiological reading**

#### **3.2.1. Merging different reading methods**

For more than two decades biblical scholars have been afraid of merging literary and socio-scientific approaches. Vernon K. Robbins (1995:263) notes this fear, stating that “these two approaches represent opposite interests: any marriage of the two produces either bastard or stillborn children”. Although works that combine the narrative and socio-scientific reading of the Gospel of Matthew are scant, there are a handful of New Testament scholars who have done significant work on New Testament writings, which can be used as methodological precursors for the current research. The merging of narrative and sociological criticism was first suggested by David Rhoads' (1982:426) when he reviewed the methodologies applied to Mark and generally suggested the future course of gospel studies.

David Rhoads (1982:412), who coined the phrase “narrative criticism” investigating the formal elements of the gospel narratives and rhetorical techniques used in delivering the story, suggests the necessity of merging narrative criticism with socio-scientific criticism. However, despite proposing an interdisciplinary approach to gospel studies, he does not describe the required methodology.

Vernon Robbins (1995:277) promotes the integration of socio-scientific criticism and literary criticism. He maintains that “[r]hetoric provides a socially and culturally oriented

approach to texts, forming a bridge between the disciplines of social-scientific and literary criticism”.

Petersen (1985:ix) attempts to merge literary and sociological approaches by fusing his method of reading with the historical-critical method. Though his methodology assumes the inadequacy of the literary and sociological as well as historical-critical approaches as separate endeavours, his approach is not disconnected from the historical-critical approach. Rather, he builds his methodology on the insights obtained through the historical-critical approach (Petersen, 1985:ix). He states that the reason behind the merging of the literary reading and sociological approach to the text is related to his recognition of “worlds” as human constructions. Petersen states:

“[W]orlds” are human constructions, whether they are the constructions of societies or of narrators, and that narrative worlds are comprised of the same kinds of social facts—symbolic forms and social arrangements—as so-called real worlds. Thus narrative worlds can be studied like any other world (Petersen, 1985:ix).

This statement assumes Berger and Luckmann’s (1966:1-3) theory of the sociology of knowledge, which is that every reality is a construction of human beings; therefore, society itself is “a product of human beings”. It is a human understanding of the universe. From this, we can see the basis for Petersen’s merging of the narratological approach with the socio-scientific approach, namely the sociological theory called the sociology of knowledge (Berger and Luckmann, 1966:16). For Petersen (1985:1-2), as the narrative world is the author’s “interpretation of the contextual world, the social universe/social-historical reality” is a reflection/construction of the symbolic universe. Therefore, Petersen believes that both are speaking about the same idea, that is, a world or a reality is a human construction. Regarding the cultural anthropological aspect of his methodology, Petersen uses similar reasoning as with his sociological aspect. Concerning cultural anthropology, he holds the premise that the world consists of “symbolic forms and social arrangements” (Petersen, 1985:ix).

To understand Petersen’s literary sociological method, three interlinked ideas need to be considered: narrative world, symbolic forms, and social arrangements. Petersen contends that in the narrative of the text there are two worlds: the contextual world and the narrative world. While the contextual world refers to the context in which the text was written, the narrative



world is an imaginative world created by the author within the text (Petersen, 1985:7). This explains the link between the two worlds (Petersen, 1985:8). Petersen defines social arrangements as the main social structure underlying the action of the actor (Petersen, 1985:5), which is integrated into a meaningful and comprehensive system through symbolic forms. Petersen defines symbolic forms as “overarching cognitive systems, the systems of knowledge, belief, and value, that define these actors’ identities and motivate their actions” (Petersen, 1985:x). He argues that either the real world or a narrative world is “[a] symbolic universe, therefore, a body of traditional knowledge that is known through language and symbol” (Petersen, 1985:57).

With his literary sociological method, Petersen attempts to merge some of the aspects of narratology, cultural anthropology, and social knowledge (Petersen, 1985:ix). The foundation of the narratological aspect of his methodology is related to his understanding of narratives as a means through which human social actions and their relationship with time are understood (Petersen, 1985:10). This understanding of human social action and its relationship with time in a narrative is best expressed through three essential features of the narrative: point of view, plot, and closure. He argues that the author of the narrative, using these aspects of narratives, rearranges some of the historical facts, the social value, and the belief systems of the contextual world to create a narrative world. For him, the narrative world is a representation of the world to which the narrative is referring, i.e., the contextual world (Petersen, 1985:9-48).

Malina (1986:11) defines culture as a system of symbols that gives meaning to persons, things, and events, and have a communal meaning. This is clearly the intersection of Petersen’s symbolic form and culture as a symbolic universe. As Van Aarde points out, a system of knowledge, belief, and value (i.e., symbolic forms) is constructed from the contextual world (Van Aarde, 1992:438). Thus, the social arrangement of the contextual world is reflected in the narrative world and, according to Petersen, it could be constructed from the symbolic forms of the narrative world.

From the above discussion, it is clear that Petersen argues for the similarity of the worlds explored by the narratologist, the sociologist who advocates the sociology of knowledge, and the cultural anthropologist. All these fields of study attempt to study “worlds in the world”. While the narratologist makes an effort to reconstruct the contextual world from the narrative world, the sociologist aims to construct the social world/universe from the symbolic universe,

and the anthropologist constructs the social arrangement from the symbolic forms or vice versa (Petersen, 1985:40).

Another integration of the two methodologies by John H. Elliott attempted to determine the “why” and “how” of ancient texts through sociological presuppositions, models, and theories. Elliott (1990) recognises the importance of sociological methods in modern biblical interpretation. However, he criticises the methods used in the past, which often lacked “a genuinely sociological perspective and a sociological technique” (Elliott, 1990:2). He argues that in modern biblical interpretation great attention has been given to

the social context, the sociological conditioning and the *Sitz im Leben* (social location) of biblical documents”, with the aim of collecting relevant and explicit information pertaining to the social and historical context in the text, to establish “*what* was going on *when* and *where* (Elliott, 1990:2-3).

The information gathered by such a method is helpful for understanding the form and the content of the text under consideration (Elliott, 1990:3). However, he argues that in such an endeavour tracing the implicit information in the text is lacking, i.e., an “exercise of sociological imagination and conceptualization” is missing (Elliott, 1990:3).

He further contends that, though in such an attempt to establish the socio-historical circumstances of a given text the questions of what, when, and where are addressed, such a reading methodology will not address issues related to why and how the given circumstances led to the production of the text under consideration (Elliott, 1990:3). According to him, the reason is that to date sociological tools have been used to collect social data to see the bigger picture in which the text was produced, to illustrate the meaning already formulated. However, we need a tool that is helpful in

conceptualizing and explaining the interrelation of the biblical literature and its social world, the conditions under which specific literary documents were produced and circulated, and the specific socio-religious functions which such products were designed to serve. (Elliott, 1990:3)

Therefore, Elliott says,

What is needed is a procedure for appropriating and applying sociological models and concepts which at each stage of the exegetical analysis could aid our understanding and interpretation of the interrelation of literary, theological, and sociological aspects and dimensions of composition. (Elliott, 1990:3)

Elliott contends that his methodology differs from those which use a sociological approach to describe the social situation of the text, specifically from those which provide the social history of the text, because his methodology directly emphasises the entire social context in which the text was written, the reason behind the selection of specific material, the strategic arrangement of the selected materials, and the effect of the text (Elliott, 1990:xx). In the past, exegetical endeavours often failed to recognise social conditioning. A mechanism is needed through which the relationship between social reality and religious symbolism can be analysed (Elliott, 1990:4).

Therefore, Elliott developed a new exegetical method which overcomes the above-mentioned shortcomings of previous exegetical practices “through more rigorous attention to the social dimension of the biblical text and the sociological dimension of the exegetical task” (Elliott, 1981:1), named sociological exegesis (Elliott, 1990:7). He defines sociological exegesis as an “analytic and synthetic interpretation of a text through the combined exercise of the exegetical and sociological disciplines, their principles, theories and techniques” (Elliott, 1990:7-8).

What makes this method sociological, is its use of different “perspectives, presuppositions, modes of analysis, comparative models, theories and research of the discipline of sociology” (Elliott, 1990:8). His main emphasis on the biblical text makes his methodology exegetical; furthermore, the goal of this exegetical striving is to find out “*how* and *why* the text was designed to function, and what its impact upon the life and activity of its recipients and formulators was intended to be” (Elliott, 1990:8). Thus, according to his methodology, the text is defined as a means through which a message is transferred in circumstantial situations. This shows that Elliott recognises that texts are sociological both in their intent and content; therefore, texts are both the products as well as the social force of society (Elliott, 1990:9, 19). This leads him to make a clear distinction between “the strategy and the situation of the text” (Elliott, 1990:10). He prefers to use the term “strategy” over the conventional words “purpose or intention” (Elliott, 1990:10-11) and uses the term “situation” to designate

various typical fields of interpersonal or social interaction which have shaped the composition of a text (such as the need for group self-clarification, demarcation from other groups, social competition and conflict, group consolidation, a legitimization of authority, and the like). (Elliott, 1990:10)

As Wire rightly notes, in Elliott's sociological exegesis, a significant amount of attention is given to the text, for it is "the only witness to its specific situation" (Wire, 1984:209); therefore, his exegetical method is a kind of rhetorical analysis that Elliott contends, through searching for the strategy of the writer within the text, its context can be explicated. In Elliott's exegetical method, "the literary text serves as the primary focus, starting point, and empirical control of sociological analysis" (Elliott, 1981:8). Therefore, his emphasis on the literary text as the first step in his methodology makes his approach different from those who use sociological tools to analyse social history in a diachronic way, as well as from those who analyse the sociological makeup of a whole society in a given period synchronically (Elliott, 1981:8). This distinctive feature of his methodology is an indication of the literary perspective from which he does sociological exegesis/social scientific analysis (Staden, 1991:40).

Another scholar who attempts to merge the literary-critical approach with the socio-cultural reading method, is John Darr (1998). Darr's reading method has three assumptions: the rhetorical function of literature, the source of meaning as an on going interaction between "the rhetorical strategy of the texts and the interpretive structure ... of its reader", and the necessity of the socio-cultural context of the text (Darr, 1998:20-21). By emphasising the most common socio-cultural features in the ancient Mediterranean world, such as a conflict between the charismatic philosophers and authoritarian rulers, he endeavours to merge socio-cultural criticism with literary theories (Darr, 1998:92-136).

Other scholars who have attempted to use interdisciplinary approaches in their studies are Philip Esler and Ronald Piper (2006), who in their work on John's gospel, make an effort to merge narrative criticism with socio-scientific criticism using characterisation, prototypes, and social memory. They claim that "[b]y focusing on Lazarus, Martha, and Mary as prototypical Christ-followers, we inevitably enter the question of characterization in the Fourth Gospel" (Esler and Piper, 2006:18).

Another social-narrative reading model of the Scripture is suggested by Coleman A. Baker (2010). He argues that “the narrative of Acts attempts the recategorization of Judean and non-Judean Christ-followers and those on either side of the debate over non-Judean inclusion in the Christ movement into a common ingroup” (Baker, 2010:1). According to him, the author of the book of Acts formed the identity of the community “by presenting Peter and Paul as prototypical of a common superordinate Christian identity in the midst of diversity and conflict within the Christ movement in the last decade of the first century C.E.” (Baker, 2010:1).

Baker’s socio-narrative criticism developed out of Paul Ricoeur’s narrative identity (Baker, 2010:159). Ricoeur coined this phrase and defines it as “the kind of identity that human beings acquire through the mediation of the narrative function” (Baker, 2010:93). According to Ricoeur, the identity of a person is shaped by three stages: prefiguration,<sup>11</sup> configuration<sup>12</sup>, and refiguration.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, narrative identity is built in through the interaction with the narrative in which the former identity, the preconceived ideas of the reader, and the reconfiguration of that identity in the light of the narrative, interact with each other. Baker, in the process of developing further Ricoeur’s narrative identity model, attempts to merge social identity, memory, and narrative theories.

Though the methodology employed in this research is named similarly to Baker’s method, socio-narrative identity, the connotation is not the same. While Baker’s reading method seeks to explore the personal identity formed through interaction with the narrative, the primary target of the methodology which will be employed in this research, is investigating the role of the narrative in forming the identity of the ideal readers’ community, in other words, the identity of a society the author of the gospel imagined. Therefore, the reading methodology that will be employed in this research is more ideological, i.e., investigating the strategic function of the narrative. The difference is not only in the ultimate goal of the methodology but also in the theories utilised in the methodologies. It will shortly become clear that this research utilises

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<sup>11</sup> “The preunderstanding the reader/hearer brings to the text” (Baker, 2010:54). [

<sup>12</sup> “The author’s construction of the text and the readers’ interaction with the narrative world of the text” (Baker, 2010:54).

<sup>13</sup> “The fusion of the world of the text and the world of the reader” (Baker, 2010:54).

Barthes' mythological reading theory in association with Burton Mack's mythmaking and identity formation theories as methodological heuristic tools to determine the role of the narrative in forming the identity of its reader.

Warren Carter (1994) also attempts to merge narrative criticism with socio-scientific criticism. In his book he uses the combination of three methods: socio-scientific criticism (Turner's liminality model [Turner, 1969]), historical criticism, and audience-oriented criticism (Booth, 1983; Iser, 1974; Chatman, 1978), and the model of Peter J. Rabinowitz and Smith (1998), which later used in gospel studies by Kingsbury (1988). Carter's aim is to see how the household structure in the narrative forms the understanding of discipleship. Thus, he combines audience-oriented criticism, which is advocated by Kingsbury in New Testament scholarship, with Victor Turner's socio-scientific model of liminality (Carter, 1994:9).

David B. Gowler (1991) merges narratology with cultural anthropology in his analysis of the depiction of the Pharisees in Luke-Acts and developed a reading methodology called a socio-narratological approach (cf. Arlandson, 1997; Kurz, 1989:100-107). In this study, he analyses the character of Pharisees using the characterisation aspect of narrative criticism and "the honor/shame", "patron/client", "purity rules", and "kinship" aspects from socio-scientific criticism. It is a combination of narratological reading and sociological description that tries to understand the sociological situation or context in which the text was produced.

However, in addition to looking at the social situation in which the Gospel of Matthew was written, to determine the role of the text, specifically, the role of non-Judean characters included in the narrative, in shaping the identity of the ideal readers' community, the methodology which I want to employ in this research, is socio-scientific, an integration of a sociological theory, i.e., the "us" vs the "other" of social identity construction theory, narrative theory and semiological reading.

### **3.2.2. Barthes' semiological reading and gospel studies**

Johannes A. Smit's (1994a:41-54; 1994b:55-67) two-part foundational article is included here, not in terms of merging different reading methods, but rather to highlight his ground-breaking work on reading the gospels, specifically the Gospel of Mark, through Barthes' semiological reading method, which is an initial step in the development of the methodology employed in

this research. In his articles, he establishes a theoretical framework for reading the Gospel of Mark with Barthes' semiological reading of myth in conjunction with the Bakhtinian theory of dialogism to enrich the conclusion of the gospel narrative as a second order of signification. In the first article, he argues that he used Barthes' semiological reading method "for the critical reading of myth" in which he "tried to show that it is primarily divine time and spatial views which constitute the mythical discourse in Mark" (Smit, 1994a:52). As shown in the second article (Smit, 1994b:55-67), the signification in the Gospel of Mark is determined by the divine chronotype, which is represented by the protagonist, Jesus. This divine chronotype is inhabited by the reader (Smit, 1994b:63). Therefore, the discourse intention is postulated but it also influences the narrative, and it is determined by the divine chronotype.

Another scholarly work with a similar methodology to the one employed in this research, is by M. Anthony Apodaca (2006:14-29). Apodaca's goal was to develop a theoretical framework using a theory of myth as a heuristic tool that enables him to interpret the embedded text of Isa. 7:4 in Matt. 1:23. The similarity with this study, is that he also uses Roland Barthes' semiological reading method and Burton Mack's mythmaking and social identity formation theories as heuristic tools. Furthermore, just as Apodaca states that "[t]he function of the embedded text is thereby one of social argumentation and legitimization, dictated by the social concerns of the community, especially with regards to self-identity" (Apodaca, 2006:15), in this research, I argue that the non-Judean characters in the Gospel of Matthew, such as the four non-Judeans in the genealogy account, the Magi, the centurion, and the Canaanite woman, were used by the implied author to form the identity of the ideal readers' community. However, the methodology used in this research differs in many ways. One of the differences is that Apodaca's article is based on the assumption that a community exists behind the Gospel of Matthew. However, my research does not assume the presence of one particular audience of the gospel. Instead, it assumes the gospel was addressed to the 1<sup>st</sup>-century followers of Christ, who were searching for a definition of their identity in the light of their surroundings, to shape their identity, and define their social boundaries. The other difference is that in this research the social boundaries are studied in the narrative world, whereas Apodaca's methodology allows him to enter the world behind the text. Furthermore, in addition to myth theory and Mack's mythmaking and identity theory, this research employs social identity theory, "us" versus "others", and characterisation theory to determine the identity-forming role of the non-Judean characters in the Matthean narrative.

### **3.2.3. Conclusion**

Though both Elliott and Petersen in their methodologies attempt to merge a literary and social-scientific approach to the reading of a biblical text as a document produced in a specific context, the reasons behind their merging of these methods are different. For Petersen, the reason for merging the methods is, on one hand, related to the assumption that all worlds are human constructions (i.e., real or narrative worlds). Therefore, like a sociologist who studies the social phenomena of the real world, anyone who is interested in studying the sociological conditioning of the literary or the narrative world, can use a sociological tool to study the social phenomena which are necessary to sustain the life of actors in the narrative world (Petersen, 1985:ix). On the other hand, it is based on the assumption that “narrative or story is probably a universal means of understanding human social actions and relationships in time” (Petersen, 1985:10). Therefore, it is the means through which one can understand the sociological phenomena of the narrative world in which the actors in the narrative dwell (1985:10).

Elliott, in his methodology, addresses the issues related to the social situation in which the text is produced as well as the rhetorical strategy of the text. He argues that both literary criticism and socio-scientific criticism are linked in their tasks and goals (Elliott, 1990:xxxi). Therefore, it is time to merge the two methodologies (Elliott, 1990:xxxi).

## **3.3. The way forward: A socio-narrative reading of Matthew**

### **3.3.1. A semiological analysis and Matthean narrative as myth**

This research is interested in using some of the methodological insights of Petersen, Elliott, and others to develop a reading model in which the social identity-forming role of the Gospel of Matthew as narrative (i.e., as ancient Greco-Roman biography). This model uses Burton Mack’s mythmaking theory, social identity formation theory, and Roland Barthes’ semiological reading theory. The following sections will provide further clarification of the terms myth, mythmaking, social identity formation, and their relationship with each other.

#### ***3.3.1.1. Myth as a means of disseminating ideology***

Typically, myth is understood as a false fable, or legend story (McCutcheon, 2000:191). Though in some scholarly circles the term is defined in two major categories, rationalist and romantic



(Blumenberg, 1985; Segal, 1999), the popular assumption which defines myth as a false fable or legend story, is possibly the major influential factor behind modern scholarly works on myth (McCutchen, 2000:191). I will not attempt to review all definitions to describe myth, but endeavour to find a working definition that clarifies the identity-forming role of myth that can be applied to the role of inclusion of the non-Judean characters in the Matthean narrative informing the social identity of the implied readers.

Robert A. Segal states that the rationalist definition of myth dominated the work of 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century scholars such as Edward B. Tylor (1871) and James G. Frazer (2009), who defined myth as the primeval equivalent of science (Segal, 2006:339). For them, myth was a religious explanation of the natural world during the pre-scientific era (Segal, 2006:399). Therefore, according to Segal, “[M]yth and science are not merely redundant but outright incompatible: myth invokes the wills of gods to account for events in the world; science appeals to impersonal processes like those of atoms” (Segal, 2002:611-612). However, within the rationalist category of myth, there is a minor variation. Scholars like Christian Gottlob Heyne contend that myth is not just a pre-scientific explanation of the natural world; it is also the memorisation of past significant events or heroic deeds. On the other hand, Levi-Strauss argues that primeval mythology is not unscientific in nature; it simply makes use of a different mode of thinking. While modern thinking tends to be conceptual, mythical thinking is more concrete in the sense that its primary purpose is to clarify both worlds (Segal, 2002:611-620).

Contrary to what has been said about myth as the primitive counterpart of science, Bronislaw Malinowski contends that myth is not a primitive equivalent to science, for ancient culture includes both science and myth. While ancient societies used science to control and explain the physical world, they used myths to resolve problems in the world caused by natural catastrophes. However, the function of myth is not limited to reconciling humans to natural catastrophes; its function also includes reconciling humans to unpleasant social conditions caused by societal forces such as law, customs, and social institutions (Malinowski, 1926:104).

Other scholars, who adhere to the romantic definition of myth, like Carl Jung (1968) and Mircea Eliade (1959), define myth not in terms of an explanation for the physical or social universes; rather, it is an everlasting phenomenon that communicates otherworldly substances. For instance, Jung, who was a psychologist, defines myth as a symbolic message from ourselves to ourselves. It is a means through which our personality, which is hidden in our subconscious,

has a chance to express itself in the form of symbolic expression (Jung, 1998:88-94). Using psychological analysis, Carl Jung (1875-1961) suggests that human beings have a “collective unconscious” which serves as an archetype. These archetypes are often conveyed by means of myth, religious expressions, and other literary products. In line with this definition of myth, Eliade contends that myth is eventually a means through which experiencing the heavenly is possible (McCutcheon, 2000:191). Unlike Malinowski, who sees the function of myth as reconciling human unfortunates, Eliade also defines myth in terms of an explanation of the physical world. For him myth is an attempt to return to the origin of the world to explain the current human contradictions. Therefore, myth is a medium through which humans may meet the gods (Eliade, 1959:205).

While there are significant differences between the rationalist and romantic definitions of myth, both definitions have common assumptions: the myth remains substantial, while characterised by its substance, and it is not a tangible or true story. Russell T. McCutcheon believes that a classification that treats myth as a false story possibly emerged from Plato’s oppositional distinction between *mythos*, a fable story, as opposed to *logos*, a true story (McCutcheon, 2000:191). Furthermore, he argues that this general distinction “is not always evident in ancient Greek literature and thus may not have been as widely representative of Greek views on *mythos* as is now customarily thought” (McCutcheon, 2000:191). Even Plato himself did not categorise myth as a wholly false story; he rather attempted to challenge the old myths and replace them with new ones. Plato referred to “the myth of *Eros* [in the *Phaedo*] and the myth of the creation of the world [at the end of the *Republic*]” (Doniger, 2011:3). Therefore, Doniger contends that “[t]he myths that Plato didn’t like (those created by other people, such as nurses and poets) were lies, and the myths that he liked, that he created were truths” (Doniger, 2011:3).

Some structuralist scholars, like R.L. Gordon (1977), study myth as one studies language. They contend that there is a similarity between the way languages and myths are structured; therefore, as any language structure is studied as a comprehensible structure, the function and the meaning of myth are extracted by studying the relationship between elements in the myth.

On the other hand, Roland Barthes defines myth as “a type of speech” (Barthes, 1972:108). Though he defines myth as a speech act, he also analysed different writings,

photographs, cinema, sport, and so on (Barthes, 1972:108). Myth is a means of communication. What Barthes called “myth” is actually the way a culture connotes and allows significance to its general surroundings. He claims that this definition helps us to perceive myth as “a mode of signification, a form”, not just as a concept or an idea (Barthes, 1972:107). This form or mode of signification derives its meaning from the socio-historical circumstances (Barthes, 1972:108). Furthermore, for Barthes, “myth is not defined by the object of its message, but the way it utters this message: there are formal limits to myth, there are no substantial ones” (Barthes, 1972:107). Therefore, he continues, “everything can be a myth provided it is conveyed by a discourse” (Barthes, 1972:107).

Russell T. McCutcheon (2000:200) also defines myth, not in terms of a “self-evidently meaningful thing... that can be learned, retold, recorded, interpreted and studied” or “as a kind of narrative identifiable by its content”; he defines it “as a technique or strategy” (McCutcheon, 2000:199). Furthermore, following Barthes, McCutcheon opines that myth ought to be comprehended in a formal instead of a substantial way. Therefore, he argues that myth does not have fixed characteristics that help us to distinguish it from the other forms, such as folk tales, legends, and so on (McCutcheon, 2000:200). For McCutcheon (2000:200), myths are “social argumentations found in all humanity”. According to him, myth as an instrument of society will shape its world and identity. He contends that societies use myths that “reflect, express, explores, and legitimizes their own self-image” (McCutcheon, 2000:200). For McCutcheon, myth is ideology. This ideological definition of myth is also advanced by Bruce Lincoln (1999:xii), who describes myth as “ideology in narrative form” that is studied through social conflict theory so that it may reflect social situations (Lincoln, 1999:149). Similarly, Eric Csapo proposes that “myth is a function of social ideology... and we should not insist on certain contents and context but rather use these as evidence for the existence of the mythic function” (Csapo, 2005:9). Csapo concludes that:

... mythology is indistinguishable from a particular ideological function, mystification, and a particular operation claimed to be especially characteristic of bourgeois ideology, namely naturalization (concealing the constructed nature of the ‘myth’ but making the myth sit invisibly upon the seemingly unassuming and matter-of-factual linguistic sign). (Csapo, 2005:278)

It is this ideological way of dealing with myth—as a type of social argumentation—which is most valuable for understanding the role of the inclusion of Gentiles in Matthean narratives in informing the identity of the implied readers.

### 3.3.1.2. *A semiological analysis of myth*

Barthes has written a series of books regarding the relationship between language structure (particularly semiology) and cultures, such as *Mythologies* (Barthes, 1972), *Elements of semiology* (Barthes, 1967a), and *The fashion system* (Barthes, 1967b). In these books, his main emphasis is on how signs as products of a society should be analysed. Barthes' main contribution is often associated with his unique merging of semiology and cultural sociology (Elliott, 2014:87).

In *Mythologies*, he analyses his contemporary French culture by using a combination of structural anthropology and Marxism as heuristic tools (Barthes, 1972). He does this by developing one level of Saussurian semiological analysis of signs into two levels (Barthes, 1972:117). In this book, Barthes depicts the function of myth as showing social reality naturally, “what-goes-without-saying” (Barthes, 1972:10). Therefore, though “myth is a type of speech”, Barthes contends that it should not be treated merely as a language (Barthes, 1972), because mythology “is a part both of semiology<sup>14</sup> in as much as it is a formal science, and of ideology in as much as it is a historical science: it studies ideas-in-form” (Barthes, 1972:111). Furthermore, as myth is a product of culture, its meaning is shaped by the culture in which it is created; therefore, it is subject to scrutiny. Thus, for Barthes, myth is not just a fable story (e.g., about gods or ancient heroes); rather, it is a system of activities, suppositions, and portrayals, which could be referred to as discourses.

In the second half of *Mythologies*, under the sub-title “Myth today”, Barthes clearly states his theoretical framework (i.e., the Saussurian model) used to analyse myth. As a conventional condition, the *signifier* + the *signified* = the *sign*<sup>15</sup> (Barthes, 1972). Therefore,

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<sup>14</sup> “Semiology is a science of forms, since it studies significations apart from their content” (Barthes, 1972:110).

<sup>15</sup> The example used by A. Baumann to explain the meaning of these three words is very helpful to understand how Barthes uses the words in his article: “I secretly put some roses on a person’s work desk to express my passion for that person. The roses, the *material* object of the roses, are the *signifier*. The *idea* which I am using the roses to

[t]he relation between signifier and signified, for Barthes as for Saussure, is arbitrary – that is to say, socially conventional. Barthes calls this a ‘first-order’ signifying system in which the proliferation of discourse is contingent – signs are always a matter of historical and cultural convention. Language in this sense, for Barthes, is creative, rich in its multiple associations, and capable of turning back upon its own conventional ‘arbitrariness’. (Elliott, 2014:90-91)

Myth has a similar tri-dimensional pattern: signifier, signified, and sign; however, myth differs from a language framework in the sense that it is constructed from the existing semiological order. Therefore, it is a second-order meaning. In mythology, the semantic sign (the linguistic sign, which might be an image, painting, custom, narrative, and so on) becomes the mythological signifier. Therefore, myth is “a second-order in the semiological system” (Barthes, 1972:113). This means that the signifier (image) and signified (concept) bring forth a sign, thus the sign is a cumulative total of image and concept in the first system. However, according to Barthes, “a sign (namely the associative total of a concept and an image) in the first system, becomes a mere signifier in the second” (Barthes, 1972:113). The sign of the first mythological order, which is the signifier of the second order, is emptied of its content/meaning to become an empty form in the second-order (Barthes, 1972). To illustrate this with a diagram:

Signifier #1 + Signified #1  Sign #1 (the first semiological order)

Signifier #2 = Sign #1 (Signifier #1 + Signified #1) + Signified #2  Sign #2  
(second semiological order)

In the second semiological order, the signifier uses a sign, which is the union of signifier and signified of the first order. However, the signifier of the second order adds meaning (signified #2) on top of it; therefore, the meaning of the first order (signified #1) is not suppressed; rather, the meaning is weakened (Barthes, 1972:117). Thus, the sign in the first order “leaves its contingency behind; it empties itself, it becomes impoverished, history evaporates, only the letter remains” and becomes an empty form in the second order (Barthes,

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convey is the *signified*. I want this *thing* to speak this *idea* ... the sign which is nothing other than a word to designate the *union* of the two. To speak of the sign is to speak of the whole of the act, both the *material* and *ideational* aspects unified as one thing” (Baumann, 2015:3).

1972:116). To understand the above quotation, one needs to see the distinction Barthes makes and how he uses words like form and concept. For him, the form is signifier #2, and the concept is signified #2. Though signifier #2, which is the form of the second semiological order, is a combination of signifier #1 and signified #1, the meaning it connotes in the first order (i.e., signified #1) is emptied or put aside. However, the emptiness of the form does not entail the disappearance of meaning; rather, “[t]he form has put all this richness at a distance: its newly acquired penury calls for signification to fill it” (Barthes, 1972). Furthermore, Barthes argues that “[t]his history which drains out of the form will be wholly absorbed by the concept” (Barthes, 1972:116). Therefore, Barthes contends that the meaning of myth “is determined, it is at once historical and intentional; it is the motivation which causes the myth to be uttered” (Barthes, 1972:116). Then the mythological sign, which is an empty form, is filled with the mythological concept/meaning and creates mythological signification (Barthes, 1972:116). The form in the second-order empties itself of the meaning of the first order and absorbs the concept of the second order. This form “is filled with a situation” (Barthes, 1972:116); therefore, the second-order of myth becomes historical and intentional at the same time (Barthes, 1972:116). Thus, it is possible to say that the mythological signifier contains both the imaginary world (i.e., in this case, the narrative world), which is developed out of the historical events which are necessitated by the contextual situation. However, it is emptied of its historicity and becomes an alibi of the myth. Barthes contends that the signification of the second order “is never arbitrary;<sup>16</sup> it is always in part motivated, and unavoidably contains some analogy” (Barthes, 1972:126). Therefore, the mythological sign has no exacting referent; however, it obtains importance from the social framework in which it has a place. Baumann puts it like this: “myths... are signs which are attached to sign-signifiers not through the individual’s engagement with the signifier but by culture” (Baumann, 2015:9). Furthermore, the second order myth is motivated; it has a purpose to serve.

Barthes’ well-known example of “a young [black] soldier in a French uniform saluting on the cover of *Paris Match*”, in the first semiological layer, is an image of a man in a uniform. However, according to Barthes, in the second semiological layer (myth), the picture signifies

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<sup>16</sup> What he means by this, is that the meaning attached to it is not inherently attached to the signifier, rather it is culturally conditioned.

that “France is a great Empire, that all her sons, without any colour discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag, and that there is no better answer to the detectors of alleged colonialism than the zeal shown by this [black soldier]<sup>17</sup> in serving his so-called oppressors” (Barthes, 1972). Barthes contends that the real intensity of myth is in its capacity to display as an obvious truth (McCutcheon, 2000:201). Barthes achieves this by imagining myth as “a second-order semiological system” (Barthes, 1972:113).

As seen in the above discussion, Barthes’ definition of myth shifts from ontological to semiological. This shift enables him to suggest a new conception of myth: myth is “a language” (Barthes, 1972:11), “a type of speech” (Barthes, 1972:117), a “system of communication, a message, a mode of signification” (Barthes, 1972:117f).

### **3.3.1.3. *Matthean narrative as myth***

Seymour Chatman (1978:22-26) has fashioned narrative theory in terms of semiology. If a narrative is understood in terms of Barthes’ mythological semiology, as Johannes A. Smit (1994:45) contends, its structure is reduced to the point where it shows that the mythical signifier is equivalent to “the narrative of the text as empty form”. The narrative of the text empties itself from the history of the first semiological order to determine the significance of the second semiological order, and it is filled by a contextually framed concept (signified). Therefore, this concept may be considered an area where the implied author operates to fill what is emptied and distorted, which Barthes (1972:108) calls “signifying consciousness”. Smit lists three important functions of significance:

First, significance in myth reveals that it is the movement from concept/discourse to narrative text that creates significance.... Although it is true that event, character, and detail of the setting... in the narrative text are partly determined by the (hi)story on the basis of some analogy which exists between narrative text and historical reality—establishing the narrative's alibi—they are primarily influenced by the mythical discourse. Second, the myth undergirds itself with a variety of characters, events, and settings that serve myth in its even though limited historical contingency. Third, it also provides textual elements with a mythological perception of time and

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<sup>17</sup> Derogatory reference in original has been redacted.



space. This mythological perception of time and space already forms part of the tradition in which the myth functions. (Smit, 1994c:45-46)

As McCutcheon (2000:202) rightly argues, the similarity between the Greco-Roman biography and the gospel allows us to use Barthes' myth theory. In a Greco-Roman biography biographers sometimes write the life of a philosopher to legitimise either his importance and/or his school (Miller, 1983:166). This indicates that there is a direct relationship between the life of the philosopher and the identity of his followers. It is an ideal instrument through which certain ideology is propagated (Momigliano, 1993:99).

The fact that the gospels' narratives were written using reinterpretations of the already existing Jesus tradition, is well attested by many gospel scholars. This reinterpretation and rearrangement of these traditions, we assume, was under the influence of the contextual situation and the purpose for which each gospel was written. The authors of the gospels systematically manipulated the existing traditions in such a way that their narratives not only appear credible but also support the ideological point they were trying to make. They were establishing frameworks for a new historical and corporate identity for the earliest Christians, who were searching for new roots and identities. Though the gospels are not like epistles, which can serve as windows through which the contextual world can be seen, some contemporary issues that the authors wanted to deal with, are expressed in the gospels (Foster, 2004:3-6; Viljoen, 2006:242-243; Luz, 2005:14-17).

#### **3.3.1.4. *The reader of myth and its critic***

Though Barthes' mythological theory was developed to analyse the culture and ideology of France's consumer society, I will use his theory to analyse the culture and the ideology of the Gospel of Matthew. However, as Fowler correctly distinguishes between the critic and the reader of the gospels, I will read the Gospel of Matthew as a critic, a person who treats the text as an object to be studied (Fowler, 1991:32ff). On the other hand, for the reader, the text is not a subject of scrutiny; rather, it is a source of "inspiration", "revelation", and "real presence" (Fowler, 1991:33). Therefore, as a critic of the gospel in this study, I will attempt to analyse the identity-forming role of the Gospel of Matthew, i.e., the focus of the analysis will be the mechanism employed by the implied author to form the identity of the ideal readers' community.



The question will be, Who is the reader of the Gospel of Matthew? It has been a while since narrative critics recognised the difference between historical readers and implied readers. Because of the methodological path I chose to follow, this research is not interested in the identity of historical readers. Therefore, the focus of the analysis will be the reader inside the text. The reader inside the text can be either an ideal reader or an implied reader. Rhoads defines the ideal reader as “a reconstruction of all the appropriate responses suggested or implied by the text” (Rhoads, 1982:422). It is the reflection of the implied author from the narrative receiving angle (Rhoads, 1982:422). Robert Crosman defines the ideal reader as “the image in the literary text of the reader as the (implied) author desires him” (Bloom, Booth, and Iser, 1977:24). Adele Reinhartz clearly declares that the ideal reader of the gospel is the reader who accepts what is attested to in the narrative without critical reservation (Reinhartz, 1988:532). On the other hand, according to Wolfgang Iser’s model, the implied reader does not only include all suitable responses implied by the text, i.e., ideal readers, but also includes the real readers’ “actualization of this potential through the reading process” (Iser, 2003:xii).

Therefore, in this research, the implied readers of the Gospel of Matthew are those who were imagined by the author of Matthew to accept the intended meaning of the text without any reservation. Barthes names them consumers of myth (Barthes, 1972:127). Furthermore, this research regards the reader of the Gospel of Matthew as not only the reader imagined by the implied author, who is confined within the boundary of the text only. It also sees the reader as having certain knowledge of socio-cultural conventions, which are necessary to sustain the story of the text, and which are assumed by the author of the gospel (cf. Darr, 1993:47-48).

Readers read the gospel as myth, a type of speech. To see the full picture for which the myth was created, readers of the myth need to focus on the mythical signifier, which is made up of the whole signifier (form) and signified (concept) of the first semiological order. Barthes argues that “if readers of myth focus on the mythical signifier”, they can receive an ambiguous signification, which is dynamic. He says the myth-reader “consumes the myth according to the very ends built into its structure: the reader lives the myth as a story at once true and unreal” (Barthes, 1972:127). Myth as second semiological order will neither “unveil nor liquidate the concept”, but “it will neutralize it”. Thus, myth “transforms history to nature” (Barthes, 1972:128). As discussed, Barthes uses the picture of a “[Black]–saluting soldier” to show how myths neutralise concepts:

If I read the [Black soldier<sup>18</sup>] saluting as a symbol pure and simple of impartiality, I must renounce the reality of the picture, it discredits itself in my eyes when it becomes an instrument. Conversely, if I decipher the [Black soldier's] salute as an alibi of coloniality, I shatter the myth even more surely by the obviousness of its motivation. But for the myth-reader, the outcome is quite different: everything happens as if the picture naturally conjured up the concept as if the signifier gave a foundation to the signified: the myth exists from the precise moment when French imperialism achieves the natural state. (Barthes, 1972:128-129)

Therefore, myth, as a second semiological order, neither makes the signifier an example<sup>19</sup> or alibi<sup>20</sup>, but rather neutralises it to signify the very presence of the concept, so that the consumer of myth accepts it naturally. If a reader of a myth wants to see how the myth explains the interest of a given society, the focus will be on the mythical signifier, which helps them to pass from semiology order to ideology order (Barthes, 1972:128). Furthermore, in a given society, a consumer of myth is not just familiar with the kind of discourse, the arrangement of correspondence, or method of meaning inside a myth, they are also ready to get, appreciate, and comprehend the myth as proposed by the signifying consciousness (Barthes, 1972:108). Barthes contends that the reader of myth “consumes the myth according to the very ends built into its structure: the reader lives the myth as a story at once true and unreal” (Barthes, 1972:127).

### **3.3.2. Mythmaking and social identity formation**

As noted, McCutcheon describes mythmaking is an “ongoing process of constructing, authorizing and reconstructing social identity or social formations” (McCutcheon, 2000:202). The construction of this social identity is often linked with the interest of society; therefore, it is a group activity (Mack, 1996:11). However, a theory is needed to understand the relationship between the specific social identity and the interest of a given society. Mack (2008) set out a

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<sup>18</sup> Derogatory reference in original has been redacted.

<sup>19</sup> For the author of the story.

<sup>20</sup> For the semiologist.

social theory of religion that links social interests with mythmaking and social formation. For Mack, the relationship between social interests and mythmaking is that “social interests generate myths and mythmaking, and these myths are used to shape, criticize, think about, and argue over the on-going maintenance of society” (Mack, 2008:81). Similarly, Emile Durkheim argues that mythmaking is not optional for the existence of a given society, rather “it is the act by which society makes itself, and remakes itself, periodically” (Durkheim, 1995:425). Following in the footsteps of Durkheim, McCutcheon also argues:

A social formation is an activity of experimenting with, authorizing, or combating, and reconstituting widely circulated ideal types, idealizations, or better put, mythifications that function to control the means of and sites where social significance is selected, symbolized and communicated. (McCutcheon, 2000:203)

Thus, according to McCutcheon, mythmaking is a process by which society forms its identity. Lease (2009:133) also states that mythmaking is a group activity that creates “[a] catalogue of strategies for maintaining paradoxes, fighting over dissonances, and surviving breakdowns”.

As discussed, Roland Barthes’ and Bruce Lincoln’s definition of myth is a product of mythmaking, which is an ideological activity. Lincoln contends that ideology is a means through which a social process is tactically covered, mystified or distorted (Lincoln, 1986:164). Mythmaking is an ideological field where social groups push for their separate social intrigue and legitimisation (Arnal and Braun, 2004:462). It is about making specific and unexpected worldviews universal and total (Arnal, 1997:317). As Jonathan Z. Smith (1978:97) rightly notes, myth is a “strategy for dealing with a situation”. Therefore, as McCutcheon (2000:204) says, “Social formation by means of mythmaking, then, is explicitly caught up in the ideological strategies of totalization, naturalization, rationalization, and universalization.” Therefore, social identity by way of mythmaking is the sensible reaction to inescapable social disturbances, logical inconsistencies, and incoherencies that portray the normal human condition.

Through such a mythmaking process, the above-mentioned components are gathered into one unified narrative. The myth of existence and social identity is formed through the hidden ideological slippage in this unfolding narrative. It transfers “is” into “ought” (Jameson, 1988: 7). In an endeavour to produce suitable circumstances or to legitimise social existence,

“... mythmakers, tellers and performers draw on a complex network of disguised assumptions, depending on their listeners not to ask certain sorts of questions, not to speak out of turn, to listen respectfully, applaud when prompted...” (McCutcheon, 2000:207). Furthermore, it is significant to recognise that the mythmaking process through which a society forms its own identity, is temporally and culturally conditioned (Smith, 1982:xiii).

### **3.3.3. Narrative criticism**

#### **3.3.3.1. *Gospel of Matthew as a non-fictional narrative***

Though traditional gospel scholars such as Powell read the Gospel of Matthew as a fictional narrative and attempt to analyse the characterisation of Jewish leaders in the Matthean narrative in line with such a perspective (Powell, 1990:66-67), other scholars recognise the existence of two types of narrative—fictional, and factual or non-fictional narrative. Jean-Marie Schaeffer offers four major definitions that help scholars to recognise the type of narrative they are dealing with:

(a) semantic definition: the factual narrative is referential whereas fictional narrative has no reference (at least not in “our” world); (b) syntactic definition: factual narrative and fictional narrative can be distinguished by their logico-linguistic syntax; (c) pragmatic definition: factual narrative advances claims of referential truthfulness whereas fictional narrative advances no such claims. One could add a fourth definition, narratological in nature: in factual narrative author and narrator are the same people whereas in the fictional narrative the narrator (who is part of the fictional world) differs from the author (who is part of the world we are living in). (Schaeffer, 2009:98)

The gospels fall under the category of non-fictional narrative because, as Petri Merenlahti and Raimo Hakola rightly point out, this is in line with the pragmatic definition given above. The authors of the gospels “assume that the reader takes the story seriously and believes” and, agreeing with the fourth definition, the author and the narrator of the gospels are identical (Merenlahti and Hakola, 1999:35-38). Therefore, before proceeding further, the importance of understanding the non-fictional nature of the gospel for a character analysis is worth considering.

The first ramification of understanding the non-fictional nature of the gospel narratives is related to reading conventions. Stanley Fish rightly argues that reading conventions forces people to read a particular text in a particular way (Fish, 1980:243). These conventions set the readers' expectations by showing the relationship between the narrative and reality. For instance, in the case of fictional narrative, readers are expected to ask questions within the boundaries of the narrative world and are also expected to be satisfied by the information the narrator wishes to reveal in the narrative. However, with non-fictional narrative, readers are not expected to be satisfied by the information provided in the narrative world. As Merenlahti and Hakola contend, "[i]n non-fictional narratives, the readers do not construct the meaning of the work solely on the basis of the work itself; instead, they take into account all they know about the relationship of the work to the 'real world'" (Merenlahti and Hakola, 1999:39-40).

In the case of the Gospels, forms of narrative analysis that are more open to questions concerning the ideological and historical background of the texts must be considered preferable, because they pay due attention to the nature of the Gospels as non-fictional narratives. These forms of analysis will welcome any relevant sociological or historical information that helps to understand the complexity of narrative communication in the Gospels (Merenlahti and Hakola, 1999:48).

### 3.3.3.2. *Characterisation as signification*

The words of J.W. Harvey capture how character studies have been set aside in literary studies: "[m]odern criticism, by and large, has relegated the treatment of character to the periphery of its attention, has at best given it a polite and perfunctory nod and has regarded it more often as a misguided and misleading abstraction" (Harvey, 1965:192). Similarly, Matthean scholars have not been exempted from such criticisms, for those who indulge in exploring characterisation in the Gospel of Matthew have done so in comparison with the other gospels (see Senior, 1999:13-18; Sim, 1995:23-25; Saldarini, 2008:72-75). Though these studies have contributed a great deal to our better understanding of the social world from which the gospels were written, character studies are often ignored aspects of such studies. Nevertheless, since the 1970s New Testament scholars, especially those doing literary-critical studies, have adopted modern literary theories into biblical studies and have conducted character studies (Small, 2014; cf. Myers, 2012; Skinner, 2013; Hunt, Tolmie, and Zimmermann, 2013; Small, 2014; Bennema, 2014). The use of modern or postmodern literary theories for biblical texts is sometimes labelled as

anachronistic readings, in the sense that the theories were developed out of contemporary literature. Though the truth of this labelling is undeniable, the possible benefit of using these theories as heuristic interpretive tools to enhance an understanding of the texts, cannot be avoided.

Characterisation is one of the aspects of modern narrative studies. David Rhoads and Donald Michie define characterisation as referring to “the way a narrator brings characters to life in a narrative” (Rhoads and Michie, 1982:101). Chatman also contends that “[c]haracters are brought to life for the implied reader by the implied author through narrating words and actions. These words and actions may be those of the character himself or herself, those of another character, or those of the narrator” (Chatman, 1978:28).

Discussions on characterisation often revolve around whether characters in the narratives are considered as people who are autonomous beings with traits like people in the real world (Chatman, 1978:119). If so, the characters in the narrative are assessed in similar ways to which we evaluate people (Rhoads, 1982:417). Otherwise, they are just a construction of the author, in which case they are merely representatives of a plot, with a limited number of roles in the given context (Forster, 1955). Thus, according to Rhoads, character studies mainly “focus on the characters’ actions, evaluating the functions of their actions in relation to the plot of the story” (Rhoads, 1982:417). Those who opt for a close relationship between the character and real people, often choose a mental and psychological analysis of the character of the narrative. When they encounter missing information, they usually fill the gap by speculating on human behaviour as their framework for understanding. E.M. Forster is one of the advocates of this view, who, using psychological tools, categorises characters into two types: flat and round (Forster, 1955:67-78). While a flat character in the narrative represents a single idea or character and does not exhibit development in terms of the idea they represent, a round character is the opposite, demonstrating a complex and developing representation (Forster, 1955:78). However, those who consider a character as a representation of a plot created by the author, in addition to holding a belief that a character could be non-human, confine their analysis of character within the narrative (Scholes, 1968:17).

Other scholars like Seymour Chatman and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan use a more inclusive approach, which treats the character of the narrative as both an autonomous being and a representative of a plot (Chatman, 1978:119, cf. 132; Rimmon-Kenan, 2002:31-36). Chatman

names this approach “open theory of character” in which he sees characters as both real people and the author’s construction (Chatman, 1978:119-126).

Chatman contends that a character in a narrative is constructed by the reader using the information explicitly or implicitly provided by the author regarding the character in the narrative (Chatman, 1978:119). Such information is usually presented through what Chatman calls a “paradigm of traits” (Chatman, 1978:126), which may include adjectives that describe the character.

In this section, I will set certain parameters for measuring the characters in the Gospel of Matthew, particularly non-Judean characters, who are portrayed to signify the inclusion of non-Judeans into the ideal community. In this process, Cornelis Bennema’s three-dimensional approach of analysing New Testament characters will be followed. This approach explores “(i) character in text and context; (ii) character analysis and classification; and (iii) character evaluation and significance” (Bennema, 2016:417-429). Mainly the first and third dimensions will be used when analysing the non-Judean characters in the Gospel of Matthew. This limitation is due to the focus of the study, which is not an individual character study; the emphasis in this study is on the role of the collective inclusion of the non-Judean characters in forming the identity of the ideal reader.

In addition to an analysis of the non-Judean characters in the Gospel of Matthew in the text (narrative world) and their context (contextual world), in this research, an attempt will be made to evaluate the responses of the non-Judeans to the main character of the Gospel of Matthew, i.e., evaluating from the implied author’s point of view and their signification in the plot. Furthermore, an attempt will be made to recognise the representative role of the non-Judeans in the Matthean narrative. As Hakola states, “in the mind of the readers, certain historical persons may stand for certain symbolic values, even if those values are not attached to these persons as they are portrayed as characters in the narrative” (Hakola, 2004:40).

### **3.3.3.3. Conclusion**

In this research, I contend that the characters in the narrative of the gospel are real people described by the author,<sup>21</sup> but they are also depicted or highlighted by the author in ways that aim to achieve his ideological intention. Scholars who use narrative criticism as a heuristic interpretive tool in the process of reconstruction of character often limit themselves to the information gathered from texts. Though this is a valid character reconstruction technique, it is not necessarily appropriate for non-fictional narratives, such as the gospels, for the New Testament as a non-fictional text refers to real events (Bennema, 2016:417-429). Similarly, Petersen shows that the relationship between the referential, contextual, and narrative worlds supports the assumption that the character reconstruction of the non-fictional narratives does not solely depend on the information gathered from the text (Petersen, 1985:8). Furthermore, Petri Mehrenlahti and Raimo Hakola (2004:40) argue that non-fictional narratives such as the gospels claim that the stories contain references to the real world; therefore, a reader of these narratives fills the gaps in the story by using available information about the stories from other sources.

Therefore, the non-Judean characters in the Gospel of Matthew will be studied from the text itself. However, the study will not confine itself to the narratological world of the text; a great deal of consideration will be given to the referential and contextual world of the text to pinpoint the ideological role of the non-Judean characters. In addition to this, an attempt will be made to see how the non-Judean characters in the Matthean narrative fulfil a representative role in their context.

### **3.3.4. Social identity construction theory: “Us” vs. “others” in the Matthean narrative**

In this section, an attempt will be made to give a brief explanation of the social identity construction theory employed in this research. Kathryn Woodward proposes that “[i]dentity gives us an idea of who we are and of how we are related to others and to the world in which we live” (Woodward, 1997b:1). Since the 20<sup>th</sup> century, studies about this have multiplied among scholars in social science, psychology, and anthropology (Siker, 2005:110). In these studies,

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<sup>21</sup> Historical people.



scholars endeavour to look for patterns of individuals or group perception of conflict between groups, of how people relate to others as individuals as well as groups, and so on (cf. Neyrey, 1997:xii). A significant finding of these studies is that they overturn the former theory of conceived identity in terms of cultural identity. Scholars define cultural identity in two ways. Some hold that “our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as ‘one people’, with a stable, unchanging and continuous frame of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history” (Hall, 1997:69). Others define cultural identity in terms of history; therefore, cultural “identities are the name we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past” (Hall, 1997:70). According to these definitions, identity is more static and bases itself either on “natural” or “essential” elements or common history.

However, recent studies on identity have changed their mode of investigation from focusing on commonalities and continuities and have started to look for the ways people perceive themselves and others in particular times and places. Such scholars have developed social construction theories (Cerulo, 1997:386). This understanding of identity as a socially constructed phenomenon is “a conceptual tool with which to understand and make sense of social, cultural, economic and political changes” (Woodward, 1997c:1). According to this mode of investigation, the identity of a person or a group is dynamic, fluid, and constantly changing (Cerulo, 1997:387). According to Woodward, conceiving identity in the light of social construction, helps us to see the most common ways identity, whether individual identity or group identity, is often constructed in relation to others (Woodward, 1997a:35). Judith M. Lieu rightly points out this feature of identity formation when she says “[w]herever we look for the emergence of ‘the self’ there looms the specter of ‘the other’” (Lieu, 2005:269). Therefore, in this research the identity of the ideal readers’ community is conceived as a socially constructed identity in the light of the outsiders.

This task of differentiating oneself or one’s group from “others” is an attempt to make the world around us knowable. It is a process by which knowledge is produced and embodied through a system of classifying phenomena in the world. And it is also one of the ways the identity of a society is constructed (Lincoln, 1989:7-8). However, this task of categorisation in

the phenomenal world is not only for the sake of knowability; rather, it is helpful to situate oneself relative to the “others”.

This research uses this social identity construction theory as a heuristic interpretive tool to analyse the role of the Matthean narrative, specifically the inclusion of negatively stereotyped non-Judeans in the Matthean narrative, in redefining boundary markers, i.e., in constructing the identity of the ideal readers and the ideal readers’ communities. This aspect of it will be explicated in the next chapter, in which I will argue that the implied author used the stereotypical negative depiction of non-Judeans as “others” as a literary tool to construct the identity of the ideal readers’ community.

### **3.4. Conclusion**

In attempting to develop a working interpretive framework through which we can see the role of the inclusion of the non-Judean characters in the narrative world of the Gospel of Matthew, Petersen’s theory is crucial—all worlds, whether the real or narrative world, are human constructions. As the real world is a construction of society, the narrative world is a construction of the narrator. Therefore, since the narrative world is the construction of the narrator and it is also an interpretation of the contextual world, and since the real world is studied by using sociological and literary interpretive tools, the narrative world can also be studied using the same heuristic tools. Even though they are not identical, for the narrative world to be comprehensible, they need to resemble the real world to an extent.

Furthermore, in this study, the focus will be on how the identity of the implied readers, that could be a reflection of the readers’ in the contextual world. In addition to this, the symbolic world or the ideological world in the Matthean narrative could be a reflection of the contextual world. However, I will argue that the implied author used the narrative of the Gospel of Matthew as a literary instrument through which the identity of the ideal readers’ community could be constructed.

As discussed above, if narratives as a sign are the products of a society, they should be studied by merging semiology and cultural sociology as heuristic interpretative tools (Elliott, 2014:87). Therefore, according to the socio-narrative reading method, sociological tools will be implemented to study the sociological phenomena of the gospel. Many attempts have been made

to answer the questions of the what, when, and where of the gospels. Although these studies are helpful for understanding the bigger picture in which the text was produced, they will not address the why and how questions—“the conditions under which specific literary documents were produced and circulated, and the specific socio-religious functions which such products were designed to serve” (Elliott 1990:3). Elliot’s sociological exegesis is crucial for the analysis of the why and how, the situation and the strategy respectively, specifically the sociological issues in the narrative world in which the narration was constructed: why did the narrator of Matthew include the non-Judeans in his narratives and how did he include them?

This study will attempt to answer these two questions by reading the Matthean narrative, specifically, where the non-Judeans are mentioned, using socio-scientific theory, namely identity formation theory in terms of “others” vs. “us”; Barthes’ theory of myth as “a second-order in the semiological system” (Barthes, 1972:113), and Mack’s mythmaking and identity formation theories. In doing so, the sociological and narrative readings of the Gospel of Matthew will be used together to analyse the role of the Gospel of Matthew, specifically where the non-Judeans are mentioned, to form the social identity of the ideal readers’ community.

Therefore, in this study, the focus will be on the functions of the significance of myth. It will attempt to carefully look at the signifying consciousness, various characters, events, and the setting in the Matthean narrative within a mythological perception of time and space (tradition) to see the underlying foundation of the non-Judean inclusion myth. This is an interpretive framework that merges the narrative and sociological reading that can be called a socio-narrative reading method.

The socio-narrative reading method is an attempt to understand the gospel narrative as mythmaking and an identity-forming effort; therefore, it is both a literary and social study. While its literary aspect examines its social effects (how), the social aspect situates the text in its context (why). It examines how the reader of the gospel reads it as a myth and how the narrative functions to form the identity of the implied readers. Thus, the analysis of mythmaking and the gospel narratives’ role in social formation through the socio-narrative reading method brings together a historical-critical, literary-critical, and sociological aspect of the gospel.

## Chapter Four

### 4. Negatively stereotyped non-Judeans in the Matthean narrative

#### 4.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, an attempt was made to explicate the methodology employed in this research, socio-narrative reading, which merges socio-scientific criticism and narrative criticism using sociological theory, namely social identity construction theory, narrative theory, and Barthes' semiological theory. This chapter will implement this reading method to investigate the identity-forming role of the Matthean narrative, specifically the role of negatively stereotyped non-Judeans in the Matthean narrative, in forming the identity of the ideal readers' community. Here, social identity construction theory,<sup>22</sup> which is elucidated in the previous chapter (see 3.3.4), is used as a heuristic tool to demonstrate how the negative stereotypical depiction of non-Judeans in the Matthean Jesus' teaching is employed by the implied author to form the identity of the ideal readers' community.

First, I will briefly investigate the 1<sup>st</sup>-century usage of certain key terms, namely Ἰουδαῖοι and ἔθνη/ ἔθνικοί. Then an effort will be made to see how the implied author of the Gospel of Matthew drew the boundary between the non-Judeans ("them" i.e., the Ἰουδαῖοι) and the Matthean ideal readers' community ("us", i.e., the ἐκκλησία) using the negatively stereotyped non-Judeans in Jesus' teaching in Matt. 5:47; 6:7; 6:32; 18:17; and 20:19. I will argue that the negatively stereotyped non-Judeans in these passages illuminate the strategy used by the implied author to construct the identity of the ideal readers' community (us) in comparison to the outsiders (them).

#### 4.2. The negatively stereotyped non-Judeans in Jesus' teaching: Non-Judean "others" as a case for construction of the identity of the ideal readers' community

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<sup>22</sup> A theory which states that individual or group identity is constructed in the light of others (Woodward, 1997a:35; Klawans, 1995:287).

#### 4.2.1. The meaning of Ἰουδαῖοι and ἔθνη/ ἔθνηκοι in the 1<sup>st</sup> century

Before we proceed to analyse the role of the negatively stereotyped non-Judeans in the Matthean Jesus' teaching, the 1<sup>st</sup>-century use of the key terms Ἰουδαῖοι and ἔθνη/ ἔθνηκοι will be defined. Therefore, in this section, an attempt will be made to provide the semantic range of meanings of the word in its 1<sup>st</sup>-century usage. I will then move on to unpacking its identity-forming role.

Most of the scholarship on early Christianity, which includes Matthean studies, focused on understanding identity in terms of religion; attempts were made to investigate the identity of the Matthean community and its relationship with non-Judeans using the “parting of the ways” and triumphalism as its overall theoretical model (see Meeks, 2002:115-138; Lieu, 2002:3-4) in which Christianity is portrayed as superseding Judaism. In both models, religion plays a vital role. However, as Daniel Boyarin (2007:70) notes, in the 1<sup>st</sup>-century context, religion was not an independent category of human experience, but rather an integral part of a culture. It is hard to separate religion from the culture of society. Therefore, it is better to strive to understand the relationship between Judeans and non-Judeans in terms of culture, rather than religion.

With this cultural perspective in mind, the meaning of Ἰουδαῖοι in the 1<sup>st</sup> century is linked to ethnic Judeans rather than the later religious term Judaism. According to Mason, the word Ἰουδαῖοι in the 1<sup>st</sup>-century context is better understood as ethnic Judeans, rather than religious adherents of Judaism, and Ἰουδαϊσμός, as Jewishness rather than Judaism (Mason, 2007:457). Because “there was no category of ‘Judaism’ in the Greco-Roman world, no ‘religion’ too, and that the Ἰουδαῖοι was understood until late antiquity as an ethnic group compared to other ethnic groups, with their distinctive laws, traditions, customs, and God” (Mason, 2007:457). Manson continues to argue that if

*Ioudaioi* were understood not as a “licensed religion” (*religio licita*) but as an *ethnos*, the followers of Jesus faced formidable problems explaining exactly what they were, and increasingly so as they distanced themselves from, and were disavowed by, the well-known *ethnos*. The single most pressing question for followers of Jesus, “Are we part of the Judean *ethnos* or not?” (2007:512)

The separation between religion and ethnic identity emerged in late antiquity in the work of Christian and Jewish writers (Boyarin, 2004: 202-206). Thus, I concur with Boyarin's

argument, which states that in the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and even in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century the distinction made between the followers of Jesus and other Judeans was often made not in terms of either religion (they were not considered an independent religious group—Christians) or their ethnicity, they rather understood themselves in terms of a different semantic field, like sects. This is similar to the distinction made between Pharisee, Sadducee, and Essene; the followers of Jesus were called sects of the Nazarenes, and in the Matthean narrative the followers of Jesus are depicted collectively as ἐκκλησία/ μαθηταὶ (Boyarin, 2007: 68-70). However, nowhere in the gospel narratives are the followers of Jesus referred to by the name Ἰουδαῖοι. In fact, as Amy-Jill Levine rightly notes, they “classify themselves as neither ‘Jew’ nor ‘Gentile’” (1988:10). Paul Trebilco (2011:440-460) argues that in early Christianity, Jesus’ followers designated themselves as the ἐκκλησία, which is an LXX term used to refer to God’s people, and not a religious or ethnic category.

Similarly, there is a need to clarify the words ἔθνη and ἔθνικοι. To avoid any misrepresentation of the meanings of the words in the Matthean narrative and to appreciate the role of their usage to form the identity of the ideal readers’ community, their range of meaning should be investigated. Gene R. Smillie says,

In *koine* Greek, meanings for τὰ ἔθνη range from the political “nations,” through the more or less neutral socio-anthropological term “people,” or “ethnic groups,” to the Jewish-specific “Gentiles” and, at the extreme end of the valuation spectrum, the equally Jewish-specific “pagans.” Uses of the latter term may be broken down even further into the merely descriptive (“pagan,” meaning outside the purview of biblically revealed religion) and the pejorative (“pagan,” with all the contempt and disdain with which a practitioner of monotheistic Torah religion could fill the word, implying, sometimes, those who deliberately reject or ignore the way of righteousness). ( Smillie, 2002:74)

In the 1<sup>st</sup> century, and also in the narrative of Matthew, ἔθνη could be used for non-Judean in the neutral sense for the nation,<sup>23</sup> which includes Judeans and non-Judeans<sup>24</sup> who are

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<sup>23</sup> See Matt. 12:18, 21; 24:7, 9, 14; 25:32; 28:19.

<sup>24</sup> See Matt. 4:15; 6:32; 10:5; 10:18; 20:19; 20:25

ignorant of the God of Israel, idolaters and the immoral (Smillie, 2002:74). Smillie argues that “Matthew appears to show examples of each and all of these uses, with differing significances” (Smillie, 2002:74). Terence Donaldson points out that the word ἔθνη is translated as Gentiles in most English Bibles due to the influence of Jerome, which in turn influenced later New Testament scholarship (Donaldson, 2013:441-442). Though the translation of ἔθνη as Gentiles may partially capture the meaning of the word as non-Judeans, it misses the neutral meaning of the word, as a nation (Donaldson, 2013:437-441). Therefore, translating the words ἔθνος and ἔθνικός as designating non-Judean people is best fitting with the 1<sup>st</sup>-century usage of the word that describes the others, the non-Judeans.

For the sake of this research, therefore, we need to take note of two things in regard to the usage of ἔθνη (non-Judeans) and Ἰουδαῖοι (Judeans). First, the assumed community in the Matthean narrative is called the ἐκκλησία (the ideal readers’ community), and individuals in the community are called μαθηταὶ (Trebilco, 2011:440-460). Second, both terms (ἔθνη/ ἔθνικοὶ and Ἰουδαῖοι) are used in the Matthean narrative to designate outsiders in terms of their ethnic identity (Levine, 1988: 10-11).

#### **4.2.2. The boundary between non-Judeans and the Matthean ideal readers’ community (ἐκκλησία/ μαθηταὶ): Negative stereotypical non-Judean “others” in Jesus’ teaching**

##### **4.2.2.1. Boundaries in Second Temple Judaism**

Mason points out that in the 1<sup>st</sup>-century context “[t]he single most pressing question for [non-Judean] followers of Jesus [was], ‘[a]re we part of the Judean *ethnos* or not?’” (Mason, 2007: 512). This legitimate question arose from the presumption that only members of the Judean community could be rightful beneficiaries of the blessings the Messiah brought. Therefore, during the Second Temple period, if non-Judeans wanted to be a part of a particular Judean ethnic community, they were expected to abandon their non-Judean ethnic identity by forsaking their idolatrous life and adhering to the Judean way of life. Among other rituals, circumcision was one of the processes by which non-Judeans demonstrated their rejection of their former life and the adoption of the new way of life (Cohen, 1989: 27). However, according to Scot McKnight, the integration of proselyte non-Judeans who performed the proselyte rites, differed from one Judean community to the next. McKnight writes, “what counted as the conversion for

one group of Jews may not have been seen as the conversion for another” (McKnight, 1991: 7). A similar point is highlighted by Cohen: “[a] gentile who was accepted as a proselyte by one community may not have been so regarded by another” (Cohen, 1989: 14).

Different Judean groups, then, had their own way of dealing with the proselyte Judeans who crossed the boundary between Judeans and non-Judeans and became a part of the Judean community. This process is one of the ways in which the boundary between “we” and “them” is exhibited. On the other hand, non-Judeans who were attracted by the Judean way of life and their God, but had not passed through the rites which enabled them to be a part of the Judean community, were categorised as “God-fearers” and were considered outsiders (Cohen, 1989:31-32). The question related to the identity of followers of Jesus, specifically the identity of non-Judean followers of Jesus, is framed in such a 1<sup>st</sup>-century social-cultural context.

I will argue that the Gospel of Matthew should be read in the light of this 1<sup>st</sup>-century context in which the implied author aimed to explicate the identity of the followers of Jesus who considered themselves as “reconstituted Israel”, consisting of both Judeans and non-Judeans (see 5.4.7); however, they defined their group identity in terms of the Judean traditions. These followers of Jesus considered themselves as the rightful heirs of Judean traditions but, unlike the Judean contemporary community, were urged to include non-Judeans in their community (the ἐκκλησία) without any proselyte rites. Non-Judeans could cross the ethnic boundary between Judeans and non-Judeans and become members of this community, who thought of themselves as the heirs of Judean traditions. In the Gospel of Matthew, the followers of Jesus are not portrayed in the light of ethnic identity markers; the identity marker of this community is their loyalty to Jesus. The implied author ascribed the category of “the people of God” to the followers of Jesus when labelling them as ἐκκλησία. These members of this ἐκκλησία are thus described not in terms of their ethnicity, whether ἔθνη or Ἰουδαῖοι, but rather in terms of their allegiance to Jesus, being his μαθηταί. Therefore, it is not demanded that non-Judeans abandon their ethnic identity to cross the boundary and become members of God’s people.

In this research, the identity of the community is referred to as the identity of the ἐκκλησία, as it is portrayed in the Matthean narrative, and non-Judean is used to refer to those who are ethnically non-Judean. In the next section, using social identity construction theory as a heuristic tool, I will try to show how the implied author used the negatively stereotyped non-Judeans in the Matthean Jesus’ teaching to construct the identity of this community, the



ἐκκλησία. Though this is not the focus of this research, I also contend that the implied author used the negative stereotypical Judean characters<sup>25</sup> to construct the identity of this community (see Siker, 2005:109-123). However, this is beyond the scope of this study. My main focus will be on the role of the inclusion of non-Judeans—both the negatively stereotyped non-Judeans in Jesus’ teaching and the implied author’s positive portrayal of non-Judean characters in the Matthean narrative—in forming the identity of the community in the narrative, the ἐκκλησία. In the next chapters, I will argue that the implied author used positively portrayed non-Judean characters to form the identity of this community. I will use Barthes’ semiological theory, as discussed in Chapter Three.

#### 4.2.2.2. *Non-Judean characterisation in the mouth of the Matthean Jesus*

A detailed analysis of non-Judean characters in Matthew, particularly the positive depiction of the non-Judeans in the genealogy account, the Magi, the centurion, and the Canaanite woman, will be provided in the next chapter. In this chapter, the mechanism employed by the implied author to portray non-Judeans negatively in his narrative will be discussed. As Chatman says, “some narrative critics distinguish characterization by ‘telling’ and characterization by ‘showing’.” According to Chatman, characterisation by telling involves “the explicit words of a reliable narrator about a character” (Chatman, 1978: 29).

Throughout the Matthean narrative, specifically in Jesus’ teachings, we can see characterisation by telling (cf. Matt. 6:7; 6:32; 18:17; and 20:25). Chatman notes, “[c]haracters are brought to life for the implied reader by the implied author through narrating words and actions” (Chatman, 1978:28). Therefore, Jesus’ words regarding the non-Judeans in the above-mentioned passages illustrate how the implied author characterised the non-Judeans stereotypically (for further treatment of the passages, see 4.2.2.3).

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<sup>25</sup> Negatively stereotyped Judeans are: “... scribes and Pharisees (5:20; 12:38; 15:1; 23:2, 13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29); Pharisees (12:2, 14, 24; 15:12; 19:3; 22:15, 34; 23:26); chief priests and elders (26:3, 47; 27:1, 3, 4, 12, 20; 28:11, 12); Pharisees and Sadducees (3:7; 16:1, 11, 12); hypocrites (6:2, 5, 16; 15:7); scribes (7:29; 9:3; 17:10); elders and chief priests and scribes (16:21; 27:41); chief priests and scribes (2:4; 20:18; 21:15); chief priests and Pharisees (21:45; 27:62); disciples of the Pharisees and Herodians (22:16); Sadducees (22:23); scribes and elders (26:57); chief priests and the whole council (26:59); chief priests (26:14); all the people (27:25); and Jews (28:15)” (Siker, 2005:115-116).

The implied author's negative stereotypical labelling of non-Judeans in Jesus' teachings characterises them as stock characters. According to Ronald L. Jackson, a stock character

refers to the one-dimensional characters in literature, [...] who are constructed based on archetypal or stereotypical representations that inform their speech, mannerisms, style of dress, personality traits, or behavioral patterns, which are easily identifiable to a particular audience. (Jackson II, 2010: 291)

Jackson adds that stock or stereotype characters "as one-dimensional representations of specific social and ethnic groups are said to influence identity politics and culture" (Jackson II, 2010: 291). Therefore, I argue that the implied author's negative stereotypical characterisation of the non-Judeans through Jesus' teaching has an identity-forming role. It shapes the social identity of the ideal readers' community.

#### ***4.2.2.3. Negatively stereotyped non-Judean "others" in Matthew's Jesus teaching as a boundary marker***

In the Matthean narrative, Jesus is depicted instructing his followers not to emulate and associate with certain people groups, both ethnically Judeans, specifically the Judean religious leaders, whom the Matthean Jesus often depicted as "hypocrites" (Matt. 6:1-16; 7:5; 15:7; 22:18; 23:1-36; 24:51), and non-Judeans (Matt. 6:7; 6:32; 18:17; and 20:25). I will argue that these instructions and teachings were intended to clarify the boundary between Jesus' followers (we) and others and to create the ideal readers' identity, the identity of the ἐκκλησία, by making a distinction between them and us. However, it needs to be recognised that the identity of us, which is formed through the Gospel narratives, is not made in contrast to a single other, but rather constructed in the light of multiple others.

Previously, Matthean scholarship, in addition to searching for the community behind the text, focused on one aspect of its identity formation. Its main focus was on investigating the identity of the community in comparison with its contemporary Judean community, in terms of we (Judeans followers of Christ) and others (Judeans). Shin rightly notes that most of the studies were done from the perspective of Matthew's tendency toward anti-Judaism or the gospel as an attempt to create a boundary from the perspective of Judaism (Shin, 2014:1-3). However, I argue the categorical terms Judeans and non-Judeans do not fully capture the essence of we, which is

portrayed in the 1<sup>st</sup>-century literature of followers of Jesus, and includes the community assumed by the Gospel of Matthew. Furthermore, nowhere in the Matthean narrative does the label Ἰουδαῖοι (Judean) or ἔθνη (non-Judean) appear to be attributed to the ideal readers' community. Instead, their distinctive identity, i.e., the ἐκκλησία (cf. Levine, 1988:10; Trebilco, 2011:440-460), was formed in comparison with the category of others, which included Judeans and non-Judeans.

However, the otherness of Judeans in comparison to the ideal readers' community, is not the focus of this research. The research will instead attempt to investigate the role of non-Judean others in forming the identity of the community *us*, the ἐκκλησία. This role is often ignored in Matthean studies.

In this section, I will argue that in Matt. 6:7, 6:32, 18:17, and 20:25 the implied author depicts non-Judean individuals as well as non-Judean groups in a negative stereotyped manner. This is typically a reflection of the 1<sup>st</sup>-century Judean attitude towards non-Judeans, which created a distinction between followers of Jesus and non-Judeans. Thus, I argue that this distinction between the non-Judean (ἔθνη/ ἔθνικοι) others and *us* (μαθηταί/ ἐκκλησία) was intended to express the border between the ἐκκλησία and the non-Judeans.

Judy Yates Siker captures this notion of others and *us*. She contends that Matthew is “a story of ‘us’ and ‘them’... throughout the text we see the evangelist drawing the lines, and one thing is clear—they are not we and we are not they” (Siker, 2005:109). Her main focus is to determine the role of the polemic against Jewish leaders in the Matthean narrative, which, she argues, was employed to construct the identity of the community. Though this is one of the aspects by which the implied author constructed the identity of the ideal readers' community, it is not the only aspect. I argue that the implied author also used the non-Judean others in the process of constructing the identity of the ideal readers' community (ἐκκλησία). Therefore, it is helpful to recognise that the identity of *us*, which is formed through the Matthean narratives, is not made in contrast to a single other; it is constructed in the light of multiple others, such as Judean others and non-Judean others.

In the Gospel of Matthew, the words ἔθνη and ἔθνικοι are found 17 times.<sup>26</sup> The focus of this chapter will be where the implied author of the narrative depicted non-Judeans negatively. This includes three references in the Matthean Jesus' teaching known as the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:47; 6:7; 6:32), two in the "community discourse" (Matt. 18:1-19:1), and when Jesus predicts his death (Matt. 20:17-28).

The first focus will be on Matt. 5:43-48, where the Matthean Jesus portrays ethnic non-Judeans categorically as other in his teaching to define the identity of the ideal readers' community. This section of his teaching is part of Jesus' series of six teachings, i.e., on anger (Matt. 5:21-26); on adultery and lust (Matt. 5:27-30); on divorce (Matt. 5:31-32); on oaths (Matt. 5:33-37); on retaliation (Matt. 5:38-42); and on love for enemies (Matt. 5:43-48), in which he illustrates the "surpassing righteousness". These six teachings are structured similarly and begin with identical formulae: "You have heard that it was said . . . but I say to you", through which he gives illustrations of what faithfulness to the Law will look like in the new eschatological situation after the Messiah has come (cf. Matt. 5:17).<sup>27</sup> Within this context, Jesus speaks what is recorded in Matt. 5:43-48. In this text, the non-Judeans (οἱ ἔθνικοι) are linked with those who greet only the ones who have familial ties with them. The word translated as "greetings", is ἀσπάζομαι, which occurs twice in the Gospel of Matthew (Matt. 5:47; 23:7). Its meaning in this context "would have the note of goodwill and of welcome" (Morris, 1992: 133). This demonstrates Jesus' comparison of his followers with the non-Judeans; the outsiders linked with welcoming others into their community. Unlike non-Judeans who only greet their allies, Jesus teaches his followers to love their enemies: ὅπως γένησθε υἱοὶ τοῦ πατρὸς ὑμῶν τοῦ ἐν οὐρανοῖς, ("in order that you may be sons of your Father in the heavens"). Maximilian Zerwick explains the use of υἱοὶ followed by a genitive case τοῦ πατρὸς as follows:

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Matt. 4:15; 5:47; 6:7; 6:32; 10:5; 10:18; 12:18; 12:21; 18:17; 20:19; 21:43; 24:7; 24:9; 24:14; 25:32; 28:19.

<sup>27</sup> Some scholars interpret the term "fulfilment" as "Jesus came to accomplish or obey the law" (Luz, 1989:260-265; Moo, 1984:38). Others interpret it as *to confirm the moral law but set aside the civil and ceremonial laws* (see Wenham, 1979:92-96); to "*fill up*" or "*complete*" the law by explaining what the law really means" (see Lenski, 1943:92-96); or to "*fill up*" or "*complete*" the law by extending its demands" (see Trilling, 1969:174-179). Another interpretation is that Jesus came as "*the one (Messiah) whose life and teaching were anticipated by the law and the prophets*" (see Moo, 1984:38).

A certain intimate relation to a person or thing is expressed in a manner not indeed exclusively Semitic, but in our literature certainly prevalently so, by “son”, υἱός, followed by a genitive. This extended usage of the word ‘son’ is more readily understood when it is a question of certain relationships to a person. Thus he who reproduces and expresses in his own way of life that of another is called a “son” of the latter; thus “sons of Abraham” Gal 3:7; “sons of the devil” Acts 13:10; Mt 13:38 (cf. Jo 8:39–44) and especially “sons of God” Mt 5:9 and 45. (Zerwick, 1963: 42)

The meaning of being a υἱοὶ τοῦ πατρὸς, (“sons of your Father”) in this context is related to the indiscriminately gracious action of the father who demonstrates it by raising the sun and sending the rain without any bias to anyone. Therefore, to be “sons of your Father” means to be an imitator of him who loves without any discrimination.

In this passage, non-Judeans (οἱ ἔθνηκοι) are depicted by the Matthean Jesus as those who only greet with discrimination, only their allies, because they do not know the indiscriminately gracious action of God (cf. 5:45b), which the followers of Jesus are urged to imitate. As stated before, this section is part of a series of the Matthean Jesus’ teaching regarding illustrations of faithfulness to the Law, as reinterpreted by the Matthean Jesus, in the new eschatological situation. In these teachings, the followers of Jesus are urged to exhibit their allegiance to the eschatological law (i.e., as it is reinterpreted by Jesus) that makes them distinct from “the tax collectors” and the non-Judean others, who neither know God’s character nor his Law. As Luz rightly points out, in this passage, the tax collectors and the Gentiles are “the negative contrast” (Luz, 2007:289) (other) of the followers of Jesus (us) in terms of knowing the gracious characteristics of God, which dictates their action (i.e., greeting). Furthermore, greeting in this passage “would have the note of goodwill and of welcome” to the community, because the term brother “refers to others than siblings and points to people belonging to the same group. Such people are normally greeted warmly.” (Morris, 1992: 133).

While non-Judeans are depicted here as greeting and warmly welcoming only their allies because they do not know the gracious God and his Law, the followers of Jesus are urged to imitate the gracious God in their greetings and love for others. Therefore, this passage demonstrates how the implied author used the teaching of the Matthean Jesus to negatively stereotype non-Judeans as others to form the identity of the ideal readers’ community. This

stereotypical categorising of non-Judeans as others is in line with the social identity construction theory explicated in the previous chapter.

The next passage in which the Matthean Jesus categorises non-Judeans using the negative stereotypical others, is in Matt. 6:7-8. This passage is in the context where the Matthean Jesus presents a series of teachings, mainly about hypocrisy related to giving (Matt. 6:2-4), praying (Matt. 6:5-8), and fasting (Matt. 6:16-18). Jesus' disciples are taught not to pray like "hypocrites", probably Jewish leaders, who are also portrayed as others as compared to the disciples.<sup>28</sup>

If the followers of Jesus do not imitate the hypocrites' pattern of praying (so that prayer must be aimed at God and not for others to hear), they must not imitate the Gentiles either. This command, "not to pray as the Gentiles" is intended to make the Christian way of prayer distinct: it is different from both Jewish prayer and Gentile prayer. (Davies and Allison, 2004:587)

Sim points out that, in this prayer, Jesus urges his followers only not to emulate Jewish hypocritical prayers, but also those of non-Judeans, whose praying is described as babbling (Sim, 1995: 27). Sim states,

the important point is that we find the Gentile world openly criticized, this time for its religious practice. Gentile prayers are denounced for their length and empty content, and the readers are once again instructed not to emulate this aspect of Gentile life. It is significant that this anti-Gentile material follows a tradition which criticizes hypocritical (on Matthew's terms) Jewish prayer (6.5-6). Whether this arrangement is attributable to the Evangelist or has been taken over from his sources,

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<sup>28</sup> Though this is not a point of this research, the description of the Matthean Jesus' stereotype hypocrite also has a role in forming the identity of the ideal readers' community. As Meier points out, the implied author of the Gospel of Matthew imaged the ideal readers' community identity as distinct from that of both Judeans and non-Judeans and contrasted it with both Judeans and non-Judeans; the author implied a "concept of Christians as a third race, set over against both Jews and Gentiles" (Meier, 1980:59).

the overall effect is that the Matthean Lord's Prayer is contrasted with both 'hypocritical' Jewish prayer and wordy Gentile prayer. (Sim, 1995: 27)

In his teaching, the Matthean Jesus warns his followers to beware of performing their "acts of righteousness" (δικαιοσύνη). Here, righteousness is something that disciples do to gain human recognition, and this is the main topic of the unit. In this unit, the Matthean Jesus uses the words οἱ ἔθνικοι (the non-Judeans) in a stereotypical manner to denote the category of others, with whom the followers of Jesus should not be identified because they are ignorant of the character of God. It includes the phrase, "... you [followers of Jesus] do not... as the non-Judeans [others]," because the non-Judeans are categorised as ignorant of the nature of God and his capability, which in turn leads them to utter meaningless repetitive words (cf. Matt. 6:7-8). Such a non-Judean way of praying is firstly rooted in a pagan view of God that fails to understand that God is not a puppet who can be manipulated if his creatures say the right words or say enough of them (Matt. 6:7b). Secondly, God knows what his children need before they ask (Matt. 6:8b, cf. 6:31-32) and already wants the best for them (Matt 6:33; 7:7-11). Then Jesus provides a model for prayer for his followers (Matt. 6:9-13). Therefore, the way the implied author depicted οἱ ἔθνικοι (the non-Judeans) in Jesus' teaching about prayer, especially in terms of negative stereotypical non-Judeans as others, indicates that the implied author employed this specific teaching to construct the social identity of the ideal readers' community.

Likewise, the third categorisation of the ἔθνη (the non-Judean) as other who is ignorant of God's character, is exhibited in the teaching of the Matthean Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount about the futility of labour (see Matt. 6:25-33). In this passage, non-Judeans are depicted as those who worry about life's necessities because they are ignorant of the nature of God, who provides food for birds and clothes for lilies, and who also knows all the needs of those who strive to do his will. The word translated as Gentiles in this passage, is ἔθνη, which is different from the word used in previous passages, οἱ ἔθνικοι. However, the meaning of the word in this context is similar to the previous one: people who are ignorant of God and who exhibit a lifestyle that demonstrates their ignorance. Davies and Allison argue that

[a]s in 6:7, the non-Jewish pagans represent the misguided, those who, because they know not the God of the OT, fail to exhibit the proper religious behavior. Just as they ignorantly heap up empty phrases when they pray, so too do they fail to trust

God's providence; they anxiously ask the questions of 6:31. (Davies and Allison, 2004: 658)

Therefore, in this teaching, the Matthean Jesus uses the word τὰ ἔθνη to negatively stereotype the non-Judeans as others, who are ignorant of God; this ignorance leads them to develop certain kinds of attitudes.

The two words used by the Matthean Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount to designate the non-Judean individuals as others, are ἔθνη and οἱ ἔθνικοι. As discussed, generally, the meaning of the words in these contexts is related to people being ignorant of God's way and, because of this, exhibiting certain kinds of behaviour. Their ignorance leads the negatively stereotyped non-Judeans to only love their allies, to utter meaningless words during prayer to manipulate their gods, and to strive on their own for things that God alone can give.

When the implied author used these words in the Sermon on the Mount to categorise non-Judeans as others, this is in comparison to the recipients of the message, the ideal readers' community, the ἐκκλησία of disciples. Thus, the stereotypical otherness of the non-Judeans in this context was used by the implied author to construct the boundary of the ideal readers' community by urging them to avoid certain behaviour which is exhibited in the lifestyle of the others.

The other instance in which the word ὁ ἔθνικός is used in the Matthean narrative, is in what is often called the "community discourse" (18:1-19:1), where the implied author dealt with issues mainly related to relationships within the church. In this discourse, the implied author issued a call to humility, upon which entrance to and greatness in the community depend (Matt. 18:1-5); he extends a warning to one who would place temptation before a disciple and to the one who has tempted himself (Matt. 18:6-9); he warns the disciples not to despise the straying disciple because of his great worth to the Father (Matt. 18:10-14); he calls on the reader to confront sin in order to recover the straying brother or sister (Matt. 18:15-20); and he urges the disciples to extend their forgiveness without any limit (Matt. 18:21-22). The word ἔθνικός is found in the immediate context where the implied author extends his call to confront sin (see Matt. 18:17). In this verse, the meaning of ὁ ἔθνικός seems different from the meaning of the word in the Sermon on the Mount, where being ignorant of God leads ὁ ἔθνικός to exhibit a certain kind of behaviour. Here, the meaning of ὁ ἔθνικός is related to a common assumption



inherited by the Matthean Jesus and the implied readers, which is the otherness of ὁ ἔθνικός, as an outsider to the group.

Scholars like Craig Blomberg contend that “[t]o treat a person as a ‘pagan or a tax collector’ means to treat him or her as unredeemed and outside the Christian community [church community]. Such treatment resembles the Old Testament practice of ‘cutting someone off’ from the assembly of Israel (e.g., Gen 17:14; Exod 12:15, 19; 30:33, 38)” (Blomberg, 1992:279). Others argue that both tax collectors and Gentiles refer to the people outside of the group. However, in this context, the verse is not related to shunning, because the text says “let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector” with a singular you; therefore, “to the brother against whom he has sinned he is as an outsider” (Morris, 1992: 469). Contrary to this position, J.P. Meier argues that “[t]he discipline of ‘shunning’ a fellow Christian would not be effective unless all the other members agreed to implement the decision” (Meier, 1983:70). Therefore, as Donald A. Hagner rightly points out, the word ἔθνικός not only shows “the unrepentant offender [who] is not simply put out of the community but categorized as among the worst sort of persons” (Hagner, 1995: 532). The word ἔθνικός is used here by the implied author to categorise a person as an outsider. His refusal to repent, shows the “brother has aligned himself with those outside the covenant” (Chouinard, 1997); therefore, he must be treated in the same way as “tax-collectors or Gentiles are treated” (Sim, 1995: 27). Thus, the implied author of the gospel used the common assumption in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, which is the association of non-Judeans with sinners, to construct a boundary for the ideal readers’ community. Similarly, Gene R. Smillie argues that “‘sinners’ in Matthew... may be in implied proverbial apposition with ‘Gentiles’ [non-Judeans], as it often is in the Jewish literature of the period” (Smillie, 2002: 74).

The other instance in which the word ἔθνη is uttered by the Matthean Jesus in Matthew 20:25-28, is also linked to the implied author’s aim to construct the ideal readers’ identity. This passage is found in the context of Jesus’ prediction of his own death (Matt. 20:17-19), followed by the immediate request of the two sons of Zebedee for special places of honour in the kingdom (Matt. 20:20-21), which makes the other disciples angry. Then Jesus says, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and *their* great men exercise authority over them” (Matt. 20:25).

In this passage, Jesus contrasts the type of ruling advocated by him and those who choose to follow him, with the type of ruling practised by the non-Judean rulers, who ruled by way of

oppression. Furthermore, in the passage, the implied author indirectly indicates a social difference between those ruled by ἔθνη rulers and the ruling of the community of disciples, who are addressed as “you” (cf. Matt. 20:26-28). Therefore, in this passage, there is a contrast between the non-Judean community, which is ruled by oppressive rulers, and the disciples. Furthermore, the non-Judean way of ruling—“the rulers of the Gentiles [non-Judeans] lord it over them” (Matt. 20:25)—is also contrasted with the ruling model of Jesus’ disciples—“whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave” (Matt. 20:26b-27a). The way the implied author depicted the non-Judeans, i.e., the negative stereotype non-Judean ruling model, shows that his interest in categorisation was to draw a boundary line between the non-Judean (them) and the followers of Jesus (us). Thus, in this context, the negative stereotypical labelling of the non-Judeans as others in terms of the ruling model, was used by the implied author to construct the boundary of the ideal reader.

#### 4.2.3. Conclusion

In the above five passages the implied author employed the words τὰ ἔθνη and ὁ ἐθνικός to indicate the negatively stereotyped non-Judeans, and to express the idea that “those who do not know God, do not belong to ‘us’”. However, their otherness is not limited only to them not knowing the nature of God but also their resulting behaviour. Therefore, the meaning of the terms ἔθνη and ὁ ἐθνικός goes beyond simply displaying the categorical otherness of ethnic non-Judeans. It communicates a conjecture that these people are pagans, who do not know God, and their lack of knowledge of him leads them to live life in a certain way, which is different to the lifestyle the Matthean Jesus is urging his followers to emulate. They exhibit certain characteristics, such as loving only their familial ties (tribalism), attempting to manipulate God by uttering meaningless words, striving for things that only God can provide, being sinners, and an oppressive style of ruling.

The above analysis of the passages makes it clear that the meanings of ἔθνη and ὁ ἐθνικός were not left for the implied reader to fill it; it is not to be assumed—the implied author provided it. Smillie rightly argues that the implied author of the Gospel of Matthew provided the perspective through which the gospel should be read (Smillie, 2002:74). This shows the implied author’s negative categorisation of ἔθνη and ὁ ἐθνικός with the purpose of showing

their otherness, by which he constructs the identity of the ideal readers' community, concluding that the ideal readers' community does not share non-Judean values.

However, the portrayal of negative stereotypical non-Judeans in these passages does not reflect either the implied authors' or the community's negative attitude towards non-Judeans, as Sim argues (1995:27-30). Such a reading is partial, because the Gospel of Matthew also exhibits positive characterisations of non-Judeans. Donald Senior notes that Sim's reading prioritises the texts that portray non-Judeans as outsiders or in a negative light, and he does not give enough emphasis to texts that portray non-Judeans more positively. Senior argues that Sim,

understates Matthew's positive view of the Gentiles by glossing over the exemplary roles of the centurion in Capernaum (see, for example, 8:10) and of the Canaanite woman (15:28), who is hardly mentioned in the article, and by not considering texts where Gentile faith is contrasted with that of Israel (e.g., 8:10; 11:20-24; 12:38-42; 21:4. (Senior, 1999:10)

Therefore, the role of positive characterisation of non-Judeans in the Matthean narrative (Matt. 1:1-18; 2:1-12; 8:5-12; and 15:22-28) for constructing the identity of the Matthean ideal readers' community will be the focus of the chapters that will follow.

### **4.3. The negatively stereotyped non-Judean individuals in Matthean narrative**

#### **4.3.1. Introduction**

This section of the study will discuss how the implied author exemplifies the Matthean Jesus' negative stereotypical depiction of non-Judeans, which has been discussed in the above section (see 4.2), in his narrative. Examples of these characters are the Gadarenes (Matt. 8:32-34), Pilate (Matt. 27:1-6; 27:62-66), and the Roman soldiers (Matt. 27: 27-28:15). In this section, I will undertake a narrative character study as a heuristic tool. As shown in Chapter Three, "[c]haracters are brought to life for the implied reader by the implied author through narrating words and actions. These words and actions may be those of the character himself or herself, those of another character, or those of the narrator" (Chatman, 1978:28). Therefore, the study will examine the actions and words that link to the non-Judean characters mentioned to see how the implied author characterised them. I will argue that this characterisation was used by the implied author to demarcate the ideal readers' community (insiders) from the generally non-

Judeans (outsiders). It does not have symbolic representational role like the positively depicted non-Judeans (see Chapter Five to Eight); therefore, I do not employ Barthes' semiological analysis here.

#### **4.3.2. The Gadarenes (Matt. 8:28-34)**

The story of casting out demons from two men takes place in the city of Gadara (Matt. 8:28). The main dwellers of this city were non-Judeans (Keener, 1999: 197). In this story, the author depicts the Gadarenes as a people who did not acknowledge the authority of the Messiah, even though it was demonstrated to them through the Matthean Jesus' act of casting out demons from two men in their city. I contend that this is in line with the conclusions in the previous section—the negative stereotypical characterisation of non-Judeans in Jesus' teaching, namely, non-Judeans are characterised as those who do not recognise and acknowledge the authority of God.

The implied author's negative stereotypical depiction of the people of the city Gadara is demonstrated by the description of the two demon-possessed men in the story and the appeal of the people of the city based on the report they received about the swineherds (Matt. 8:33-34). Jesus' act of sending the demons into a nearby herd of pigs (cf. Matt. 8:31-32) and the description of the two demon-possessed men who came out of the tomb, are the other means through which the implied author negatively characterised the people of the city. For, according to Levitical laws, pigs are among the unclean animals (cf. Levi. 11) and a dead human body makes a person ritually unclean (cf. Levi. 19:11). Thus, the author depicts the people of the city as ritually impure.

Though the swineherds have seen the authority of Jesus over the demon, they do not acknowledge this authority. Furthermore, the people of the city received the report of what happened, which most probably included the authority of Jesus over demons, but they do not acknowledge Jesus' authority either. As Vledder (1997:198) notes, their action may be explained by their socio-economic interest; nevertheless, their unwillingness to acknowledge and trust in Jesus' authority, is undeniable.

Based on the similarity of the ways in which Jesus negatively stereotypes non-Judeans in his teaching—those who do not acknowledge the authority of God and his Messiah and the implied author's depiction of non-Judeans in this story as unwilling to acknowledge and trust in

Jesus' authority—I propose that the implied author used this story to exemplify the negative stereotypical characterisation of non-Judeans in Jesus' teaching.

#### **4.3.3. Pilate (Matt. 27:1-26 and 27:62-66)**

The other character which exemplifies Jesus' negative stereotypical characterisation of non-Judeans is exhibited in the story of Pilate, the Judean governor of Rome (Matt. 27:1-6 and 27:62-66). In this story, Pilate is depicted as a typical non-Judean authority, who “lords over” the Judeans, according to Jesus' negative stereotypical characterisation of non-Judeans in his teaching (Carter, 2004a: 276). This lordship is implied when he inquires who the people want to have released according to their yearly customs. The offer presented to the crowd assumes he has the authority to release or kill whomever he wants. Furthermore, Pilate's inquisition, “are you the King of the Jews?”, presupposes the non-Judean idea of kingship, of being set to lord it over them.

Though Jesus' silence before his accusers astonishes Pilate and he also recognises that Jesus has done nothing deserving death, he is not willing to release him. Even his wife's warning about Jesus' innocence does not make him release Jesus.

Therefore, the implied author's depiction of Pilate as capable of releasing or killing whomever he wants, which demonstrates his authority over life and death, indicates that the author used the story to exemplify the Matthean Jesus' negative stereotypical characterisation of non-Judeans.

#### **4.3.4. The Roman soldiers (Matt. 27:27-28:15).<sup>29</sup>**

The story of the Roman soldiers is another incident through which the Matthean Jesus' negative stereotypical depiction of non-Judeans is demonstrated by the implied author. In this story, the mocking of the soldiers of Jesus after Pilate hands him over to be crucified, calling him “the

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<sup>29</sup> The Roman centurion and the soldiers with him are depicted as recognising and acknowledging the power of God when they confess, “Truly, this was the Son of God!” (Matt. 27:54), which is contrary to the general portrayal of non-Judeans in Matthean narratives as well as the general meaning of the phrase in the Greco-Roman world (a title attributed to Caesar) (Evans, 2012: 468). However, their confession is not linked to their being the beneficiaries of the messianic blessings. Therefore, I believe that they did not have a symbolic representational value (cf. (Luz, 2005: 570).

king of Jews”, implies they have a typical non-Judean understanding of kingship, as lording it over others. They were mocking his inability to save himself, let alone lord over the Jews.

Furthermore, the soldiers who were assigned to watch over the tomb, though they witnessed the resurrection of Jesus by the mighty hand of God, were silenced through bribes. They did not acknowledge the power of God, which is a typical manifestation of the character of non-Judeans according to Jesus’ negative stereotypical characterisation of non-Judeans.

Therefore, I argue that the implied author depicted the soldiers as mocking Jesus and being silent after witnessing the power of God through the resurrection of Jesus, again showing the Matthean Jesus’ negative stereotypical characterisation of non-Judeans.

#### **4.4. Conclusion**

I have argued in this chapter that the negative stereotypical characterisation of the non-Judeans in Jesus’ teaching was used by the implied author to show the otherness of non-Judeans. Furthermore, the implied author used the story of individual non-Judeans to exemplify Jesus’ negative stereotypical characterisation of the non-Judeans.

Therefore, the implied author used the negative stereotypical characterisation of the non-Judeans in Jesus’ teaching and the stories of individual non-Judeans which exemplify Jesus’ negative stereotypical characterisation of non-Judeans to show the otherness of the non-Judeans, who were not the beneficiaries of the messianic blessings, by which he constructed the identity of the ideal readers’ community. In the next chapters I will examine how the implied author used the positively characterised non-Judean to form the identity of the ideal readers’ community.

## Chapter Five

### 5. Non-Judeans in Matthew's genealogy: A case for redefining the identity of the ideal readers' community

#### 5.1. Introduction

This chapter will examine the genealogy in Matthew's narrative. The genealogy account is situated at the beginning of the Matthean narrative (Matt. 1:1-17). It will investigate if the inclusion of the non-Judeans characters in the Matthean genealogy is evidence for the implied author's argument for an inclusive identity of a reconstituted Israel<sup>30</sup> (see. 5.4.6 and 5.4.7), the ideal reader's community, as a people of God. The main focus of this section is on the role of the four non-Judean characters in the Matthean genealogy in forming the identity of the ideal readers' community.

In the light of the function of ancient genealogy as a myth of the origin of individuals or communities, I will engage with the genealogical account of Matthew to find out why it could indicate the realisation of the anticipated inclusion of non-Judeans in the ideal readers' community.

Marshall D. Johnson and G.D. Kilpatrick posit that the setting in which the inclusion of the four non-Judeans in Matthew's genealogy can be best explained, is the post-70 C.E. inter-Jewish debate over the ancestry of the Messiah. However, both argue that the function of the four women is a polemic against those who described Jesus' birth as irregular, which links the four women with Jesus' mother, Mary (cf. Johnson, 1969:178; Kilpatrick, 1946:52). Though such a link between Mary and the four women is hard to establish from the narrative aspect of the Gospel of Matthew, they are right in arguing that the genealogy should be understood within the post-70 C.E. social context of Jewish debate. These controversies were revolving around the genealogical purity of Judeans and the need for non-Judeans to undergo the proselytisation process to be a part of the community, which seems to fit well with the overall narrative of the

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<sup>30</sup> "Reconstituted Israel" (as I will argue in 5.2.7) is a term used to designate those who followed the Messiah.

gospel.

Though I argue that the implied author urges the identity of the community to which the gospel was addressed, the ideal readers' community, to be a trans-ethnic community, this identity was expressed in terms of Judean tradition and it considered them as a legitimate beneficiary of Judean privileges. I contend that the inclusion of the four non-Judeans in the genealogy is a polemic against the Judeans, who considered themselves as people of God and who forbade any kind of assimilation and inclusion of non-Judeans based on the assumption of the genealogical purity of their community. It also disputes those who insisted on proselytisation to become part of the community, legitimate beneficiaries of the blessings the Messiah brought.

The study will employ a socio-narrative reading method as a heuristic tool, in which both the narrative as well as the sociological aspect of the genealogical account will be considered and analysed. Using Barthes' semiological reading method, the study will explore how the implied author intended the four non-Judeans to be received by implied readers. It will demonstrate how the implied author attempted to articulate the realisation of the anticipated inclusion of non-Judeans in the ideal readers' community and how this realisation forms the boundary of its readers in the context of the rivalries of 1<sup>st</sup>-century forms of Judaism. In doing so, this section will advance the view that the inclusion of the non-Judeans in the genealogy of Matthew serves as one of the elements of a case for the inclusion of non-Judeans into the 1<sup>st</sup>-century Jewish-Christian community. It argues that the inclusion of non-Judeans in Matthew's genealogy has a threefold function: it serves as a narration against the post-exilic notion of genealogical purity of Judeans; it reveals the realisation of the anticipated inclusion of non-Judeans with full privileges without undergoing the rites of a proselyte (i.e., it redefines the community boundary markers); and it supports the case for a reinterpretation of Torah to include non-Judeans into the community. This way of including non-Judeans into the community as rightful heirs of the Judean privileges would change the social makeup of the community; thus, it worked towards forming the identity of the ideal readers' community.

To properly make my case, this section is divided into seven sub-categories. First, it will provide an overview of the scholarly endeavours to understand the reasons behind the inclusion of the four non-Judeans. Then it will briefly examine the function of genealogy in the ancient Mediterranean world. Third, an attempt will be made to briefly show how the identity of Judeans was constructed in the pre-exilic and post-exilic eras. This section will argue that starting in the



period of Ezra and Nehemiah, genealogical purity was used as a boundary marker of the Judean community. Fourth, the study will argue that the social context in which the Matthean genealogy was written, was marked by the debate over the genealogical purity of the community and the process for including others (non-Judeans) in the Judean community. Fifth, it will show how non-Judeans crossed the boundary markers in the pre-exilic tradition. The study will then discuss how reinterpretation of the Torah was used to redefine the boundary markers. Seventh, it will demonstrate that the four non-Judeans in the Matthean genealogy were included in the Israelite community through intermarriage. Finally, I will contend that the author of the Gospel of Matthew used the names of the four non-Judeans as a polemic against the notion of genealogical purity of God's people and also against the necessity of proselytisation to be admitted into the community.

The Gospel of Matthew begins with a genealogy of Jesus, which most scholars have argued features the unusual inclusion of the names of four women. However, it is unusual not because they are women, as R. Larry Overstreet (1982:132) rightly notes. A careful examination of the Old Testament reveals that there are many incidents in the Old Testament where women are included in the genealogy (cf. Gen. 25:1; 36:10; 36:22; 1 Chr. 2:18-19; 1 Chr. 2:49; 1 Chr. 2:4); therefore, the assumption is unwarranted.

Though the inclusion of women in genealogies is not unique, it was not a common practice. However, their common characteristic of being non-Judeans gives a hint that the issue surrounding this genealogy seems associated with their being non-Judean and not so much their gender. This is further attested to by the author's emphasis on non-Judeans throughout the narratives (cf. Matt. 2:1-12; 8:5-13, 28-34; 15:21-28). This suggestion is again highlighted by the phrase "the wife of Uriah".<sup>31</sup> The implied author, rather than directly mentioning the mother of Solomon, Bathsheba, referred to her through Uriah, the Hittite (Matt. 1:6; cf. 2 Sam. 11:1-27). Therefore, the inclusion of the names of the non-Judeans in the genealogical account is primarily associated with their being non-Judean.

In the past, considerable attention has been given to the inclusion of the four non-Judeans in Matthew's genealogical account. Bernard Scott (1990:83-102) contends that their inclusion is

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<sup>31</sup> The phrase "the wife of Uriah" shows that the author's emphasis is not on her but on her husband's social identity.

related to their being sinners (cf. Freed, 1987:3-18; Overstreet, 1982:132). This is mainly because the author linked their names with Jesus' vocation of saving sinners. However, this view is criticised by other scholars. The first point of criticism is that Ruth can hardly be labelled as a sinner, at least from the perspective of Jewish traditions. Secondly, if the author wanted to make this point, he could have done so without using the names of non-Judeans mentioned in his genealogical account, since the names of Judah, David, and Manasseh are more than enough to make his case (see Heffern, 1912:69-70; Schweitzer, 1976:24-25; Luz, 2007:109; Johnson, 1969:154; Bauer, 1990:461; Newman, 1976:210-211). Furthermore, Stanley Chun Man Ng successfully refutes the claim that those mentioned are sinners. Ng demonstrates from Jewish and Christian traditions that those included in the genealogy were considered more righteous than their contemporaries (Ng, 2014).

Other scholars who have made a case for the inclusion of the four women have argued that the women were in illicit marriages (Tatum, 1977:523-535; Brown, 1986:73; Waetjen, 1976:216; Freed, 1987:3-18) and/or had illegitimate children (Leaney, 1862:165; Bromley, 1982:429; Freed, 1987:3). Those who follow this argument often try find a commonality between these women and Mary. However, there is no substantial evidence that forces us to accept a link between the four women and Mary in the Gospel of Matthew. The main emphasis of the birth narrative is not Mary; rather, the focus is on Joseph. Though the name of Mary is mentioned directly five times (Matt. 1:16, 18, 20; Matt. 2:11; Matt. 13:55) and by association three times as "the child and his mother" (2:13, 14, 20, 21), she is not the main character in the narrative. Therefore, the lack of emphasis on Mary in the narrative makes any effort to link Mary and the four non-Judeans unnecessary.

Still, other Matthean scholars argue that the women in the genealogy serve as representative non-Judeans for those to whom the Christian mission would be extended (Beare, 1984:64; Gundry, 1982:14-15; Luz, 2007:110; Bruner, 2004:5-6; Heil, 1991: 542-544). Brown (1986:73) and Freed (1987:4) reject this argument on the grounds that they are depicted as proselytes in Jewish traditions. Therefore, their function in the genealogy cannot be related to the extension of the Christian mission. However, is it not possible that the author used them to oppose this notion of them being proselytes? I will argue later in this study that the inclusion of the four names functions as a polemic against the Second Temple notion of proselytisation and genealogical purity. Furthermore, Brown and Freed argue that the goal of their inclusion was

attracting non-Judeans, which justifies their inclusion. The question remains, How were ethnic non-Judeans who underwent the proselytisation rites perceived by Judeans?<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, was the implied author promoting conversion through proselytisation by providing proselyte non-Judeans as an example in the genealogy?

The above brief literature review has demonstrated that many of the scholarly endeavours so far have revolved around tracing the commonality between the four mentioned names and Mary. However, I believe that the Matthean narrative does not give enough emphasis to Mary; therefore, attempting to find commonality between the four non-Judeans and Mary is not necessary. Even those who have attempted to link the four non-Judean names to the overall thematic emphasis of non-Judean inclusion throughout the Matthean narrative, have failed to situate the issue in its social context. They mainly attempt to demonstrate the narrative aspect of the mentioned four names, but in doing so, they not only neglect the social context in which the genealogy was written but also what it was intended to create.

Therefore, I hope to fill this lacuna in Matthean scholarship, namely, attempting to determine how the inclusion of the four non-Judeans in the Matthean genealogy serve as a social identity marker of the community to which the gospel was written. Using Barthes' semiological reading method as heuristic tool I will argue that the second level semiological meaning of the inclusion of the Judean individuals in the genealogy is that Jesus' messianic vocation is for the whole world, which signifies his salvific vocation is not confined to Judeans. Therefore, it redefines the identity of the beneficiaries of messianic blessings.

## **5.2. The function of genealogy in the ancient world as boundary marker**

According to Lambros Couloubaritsis, in ancient Greek societies genealogies were a common way of writing narratives (Couloubaritsis, 1998: 33-126). Rodney Hood also contends that ancient genealogies were one of the ways by which the ancient societies wrote history (Hood, 1961:3). Jeremy Punt argues genealogy does not only state "a story or construct a narrative of

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<sup>32</sup> Cohen contends that, in Second Temple Jewish literature as well as in the literature of later Jewish antiquities, though proselytes are treated as Jewish, they are never seen as equal to the native Jews. The literature clearly makes a distinction between native Jews and proselyte Jews. Furthermore, in these texts we find certain restrictions for the proselytes which are not applicable to native Jews (Cohen, 1989: 28-30).

sorts about the past—stories that have often played a formative role in cultures in the past... — a genealogy also grounds and explains the present (and *at times probably attempts as much for the future*)” (Punt, 2013: 377). This feature of genealogy is often ignored in Matthean scholarship. This study hopes to fill this lacuna, i.e., the future formative aspect—how the inclusion of the four non-Judeans in the Matthean genealogy would form the identity of the ideal readers’ community.

Loubser notes that, among other functions of genealogies, regulating the social status of the community and evoking “the whole narrative world of the community” were prominent (Loubser, 2005:133). Hood contends that the genealogical accounts in the gospels are not mere lists of names, but summarised history in the form of genealogy. Therefore, in the gospels, the genealogies prepare the readers by providing the necessary background to the stories that will follow (Hood, 1961:10). Loubser adds, “[b]y naming them, their complete narratives and the polemics associated with them are called into memory” (Loubser, 2005:139). Likewise, Alkier argues that “[e]very name in the genealogy is a metonymy for a story told in the Scriptures of Israel” (Alkier, 2012:11). Therefore, if a genealogy is used to evoke history and used as a polemic, it begs the question, What did the author of the Gospel of Matthew want to evoke by using the names of four non-Judeans mentioned in Matthean genealogy?

As will be shown later in this study, the author of the gospel seems to be opposing those who emphasised the genealogical purity of the Judean community. I will argue that in the social context of the post-exilic exclusive Judean community, the author used the genealogy, especially the four non-Judeans, to address the need to follow the precedents of the pre-exilic community to become an inclusive community.

Furthermore, in ancient Greek societies the function of genealogy was not only to present an abridged form of history but also to “function as myths of origin” (Loubser, 2005:133).<sup>33</sup> In this sense “genealogy is the primal form of myth” (Couloubaritsis, 1998:33-126). “The simple origin of the genealogical myth lies in the repeated questions of a child who asks a parent, ‘where do we come from?’” (Loubser, 2005: 35) and, Who are we? Punt also states that the function of genealogy goes beyond indicating familial ties in that it “express[es]

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<sup>33</sup> Note: his definition of myth differs from untrue or fabricated history.

social and political relationships among individuals and groups of people, serving the purpose of grounding individual and group identity” (Punt, 2013:375). Therefore, it is safe to say that the purpose of Matthew’s genealogy, especially the inclusion of the four non-Judeans, has to do with answering the question of the community’s identity, and why they needed to develop an inclusive nature (Judeans and non-Judeans), while other Judean communities were exclusive.

Many scholars have concluded that in the Ancient Near East societies genealogies were not just collections of traditions, but rather instruments through which identity was formulated, community identity marks were established, and the proper relationships between neighbouring societies were expressed (Malamat, 1968:168-173; 1973:26-136; Wilson, 1975:929-935).

Different scholars have pointed out diverse ways in which groups defined themselves in the Greco-Roman world (cf. Neusner & Frerichs, 1985; Saldarini, 1994). Carter identifies some of these in Matthew’s gospel, of which “community definition by origin” is directly related to the topic under consideration. Carter contends that the function of Matthew’s genealogy is related to the way the community defined its group boundary (Carter, 2000:9-11). Therefore, as with other ancient genealogies, the genealogy in Matthew might serve as the boulder marker of the community, by tracing back to its origin.

Furthermore, as Robert R. Wilson argues, in ancient societies such as the Israelite community, in addition to expressing the relationship between families, genealogy functioned as a metaphor through which the other societal aspects would be expressed through the relationship between individuals and groups (Wilson, 1996: 932). The metaphorical function of genealogy is often expressed through finding a common ancestor to whom all people in the society may trace their lineage, like “the Son of Abraham” in Matt. 1:1. Wilson states that “genealogies are in fact accurately reflecting the way in which the society sees itself” (Wilson, 1996: 932).

In addition to advancing the view that ancient genealogies are forms of myth, Couloubaritsis contends that “[d]istortion occurs when the oral poet consciously deviates from the immediate facts to convey a secondary message” (Couloubaritsis, 1998: 33-126). In Matthew’s genealogical account, this feature, deviating from the normal pattern to evoke secondary or “metaphorical thinking” (Loubser, 2005:135), emerges when the author mentions the names of the four non-Judeans. For, within the ancient patriarchal society, inclusion of the

names of women was not a common practice. Furthermore, in ancient Israelite society, the inclusion of non-Judeans in their genealogical accounts was not common. Clearly, the author intentionally deviated from the common practice to convey the secondary message.

I argue that the secondary message Coulobaritsis is referring to, is similar to Barthes' second semiological reading, which is a myth. For Barthes, myth is "a peculiar system, in that it is constructed from a semiological chain which existed before it: it is a second-order semiological system" (Barthes, 1972:113). Therefore, determining the secondary meaning the implied author wanted to communicate through the inclusion of the four non-Judeans in the genealogy account, can be explicated using Barthes' semiological reading method as a heuristic tool.

Though the myth of origin is a very fruitful field of investigation to grasp the meaning of genealogy, as Loubser rightly points out, in the past most scholars have not given much emphasis to the relationship between biblical genealogy and myth, except Bultmann, who briefly touches on it (Loubser, 2005:133). Thus, genealogy as a myth of origin is helpful for readers to understand themselves and their relationship with others. As Matthew's genealogy was also written in the social context of Greek-Roman society, it most likely served similar functions, including to construct the community identity. Therefore, I think it is important to explore the relationship between myth and its role in forming the identity of the ideal readers' community.

The key question is: What is the second meaning the implied author tried to communicate to his audience? I will argue that the second meaning the author attempted to communicate to his addressees through the inclusion of the four non-Judeans, is related to the question of identity. He is addressing questions such as, Where do we come from? Who are we? What kind of societal compositional dynamics do we need? Overall, he is answering their question of identity. However, as Malina (2010:752) and Elliott (1993:128) rightly argue, the social context in which the question of identity questions were asked, shaped it (Malina, 2010:752; Elliott, 1993:128).

Before proceeding to look at the role of the inclusion of the four non-Judeans in Matthean narrative to form the identity of the ideal readers' community, I will discuss the social context in which the implied author included the four non-Judeans in the genealogy of Jesus

(see 5.3). This will make clear the role the four non-Judeans play in Matthean narrative informing the identity of the ideal readers' community.

### **5.3. Judean identity construction in the light of “others”**

In this section, I will attempt to explicate the social context in which these questions of identity were addressed. Hayes argues that the Judean identity is often constructed through the relationship with non-Judeans (Hayes, 2002a:4). By including non-Judeans into the genealogy, the implied author attempted to show that, unlike some of the post-exilic Judean communities who considered themselves as God's people, the imagined 1<sup>st</sup>-century Christian community, the reconstituted people of God, should be inclusive like pre-exilic Judean communities.

As the Gospel of Matthew is a 1<sup>st</sup>-century document, it is situated within the social context of the post-exilic period. In this period there was a huge debate over the real identity of Judean communities. Scholars involved in social studies have recently given a significant amount of attention to how society forms its own identity. For instance, Saul Olyan argues that the boundaries in terms of “other” can be constructed in many ways: “[g]ender, lineage, religion, nationality, ethnicity, race, sexuality, or some combination of these” (Olyan, 2000:63). Furthermore, he states that “through defining the other, a group determines what it is not; in short, it establishes its boundaries” (Olyan, 2000:63). Similarly, I will argue that Judeans' perceptions of others was one of the ways in which the identity of the Judeans was constructed. Klawans rightly contends that for a proper understanding of the interaction between Judeans and non-Judeans in the post-exilic period, one needs to grasp correctly the way Judeans perceived non-Judeans (Klawans, 1995:287). According to these scholars, Israel's identity was often defined in the light of others, the outsiders (non-Judeans). One of the ways the “otherness” of non-Judeans was defined was in terms of “purity” vs. “impurity” (see 5.3.1). Though I argue that the addressees of the Gospel of Matthew, the ideal readers' community, are not exclusively Judean, the implied author defines their identity in terms of Judean traditions. The author depicts the community as the true Israelites, who are the rightful heirs of the Judean's promises. Therefore, it is necessary to look at how the Judean define their identity through their traditions.

### 5.3.1. Purity/impurity of non-Judeans and the identity of Judeans

According to E. Schürer, the difference between Judeans and non-Judeans in biblical traditions as well as in the traditions of Jewish late antiquity, is that non-Judeans were ritually impure because they did not observe ritual laws of purification (Schürer, 1891:83). Therefore, the relationship between Judeans and non-Judeans could be restored if they purified themselves through the purification system and observed the ritual laws. However, Adolf Büchler contends that Schürer fails to provide sufficient evidence for his claim of non-Judeans' ritual impurity during biblical times. He argues that, before the Second Temple period, the ritual laws did not make distinctions between Judeans and non-Judeans, thus the ritual impurity of non-Judeans was a 1<sup>st</sup>-century rabbinic innovation (Büchler, 1926:2-3). Therefore, ritual impurity cannot be seen as a reason for forbidding non-Judeans to be assimilated into the Jewish community (Büchler, 1926:2).

Adolf Büchler takes Schürer's argument further by making a distinction between Levitical/ritual impurity and the spiritual or religious impurity of non-Judeans. By ritual impurity, he means defilements that were related to regulations in Leviticus 15-19 and Numbers 19. This defilement is natural and affects a person. However, the religious or spiritual impurity of non-Judeans was the defilement or impurity which was related to sinful actions that affected the purity of the land of Israel. Therefore, according to his analysis of biblical texts and Jewish tradition, non-Judeans were ritually and spiritually impure. However, he states that in the First Temple period, non-Judeans as well as Judeans were considered ritually impure if they did not obey the ritual laws (Büchler, 1926:2). Therefore, Levitical/ritual impurity was not ascribed to only non-Judeans before the 1<sup>st</sup> century C.E. and it was not the reason for forbidding non-Judeans to associate with the Judeans. Büchler argues that the notion which ascribes ritual impurity to non-Judeans only was an invention of 1<sup>st</sup>-century Judean rabbis primarily to prevent any relationship between Judeans and non-Judeans (Büchler, 1926). Therefore, according to Büchler, non-Judean impurity could not have been a reason for forbidding intermarriage.

Contrary to this, Gedalyahu Alon defines purity/impurity among the ancient Jewish people in terms of geographical boundaries. According to him, the Pharisees were "maximalist", expanding the boundaries of purity beyond the limit of the Temple, and as a consequence "taught that the laws of uncleanness applied to all Israel". On the other hand, the Sadducees were "minimalist", limiting the boundary of purity to the Temple. Alon argues against Büchler's



notion of non-Judean ritual impurity as a 1<sup>st</sup>-century rabbinic invention and argues that one can trace the idea of non-Judean ritual impurity back to the Hebrew Bible. Alon also contends that the rabbis, rather than creating this distinction, weakened the Hebrew Bible's notion of intrinsic and permanent ritual impurity of non-Judeans to the level of certain geographical boundaries (Alon, 1977: 187). According to him, the impurity of non-Judeans was not the result of their failure to fulfil ritual requirements, but because they were non-Judeans who, because of their association with idols, were themselves ritually impure (Alon, 1977:147-148).

On the other hand, Jonathan Klawans argues against the notion of non-Judean ritual impurity (Klawans, 1995:191). He firstly emphasises the difference between ritual impurity and moral impurity (Klawans, 2000). He argues that, though the same Hebrew word, *טמא*, is used to designate two forms of impurity in the Hebrew Bible, the term communicates two distinct forms of defilement depending on its usage in Priestly texts (cf. Lev. 1-16) and the Holiness Code (cf. Lev. 17-26) of the Hebrew Bible. While the Priestly texts connect the term with the idea of impurity in the context of rituals, in the Holiness Codes, the term is linked to the idea of impurity in the context of morality. He contends that ritual impurity is communicable to secondary objects or persons and can be a reason to be banned from contacting a holy place. Ritual impurity can be purified through ritual purifications. On the other hand, moral impurity is related to sinful acts, is not communicable to other objects or persons, and cannot be purified through the purification system. However, Klawans argues that “no biblical text considers Gentiles to be ritually impure” (Klawans, 1995:291), because “Gentiles are not affected by the ritual purity system. They are exempt from almost all<sup>34</sup> of the biblical purity laws” (Klawans, 1995:290). In addition to the Hebrew Bible, Klawans investigated the idea of ritual impurity and moral impurity in the latter Jewish literature, such as texts from Qumran and the Tannaim, as well as the New Testament, and contends that they are more interested in moral impurity than ritual impurity (Klawans, 2000:158). Furthermore, concerning the reason behind prohibiting intermarriage in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, he argues that it is not because foreign wives were ritually impure, but rather because “they are idolatrous and will lead astray any Israelites they marry” (Klawans, 2000:45).

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<sup>34</sup> Klawans points out a few exceptional cases, such as the resident alien, who is “considered to be susceptible to impurity from corpses (Num. 19:10) and from eating animal carcasses (Lev. 17:15-16)” (Klawans, 1995:280).

However, Klawans' stand is rejected by scholars such as Gary Knoppers, C.E. Hayes, Harold Washington, and Sylvester Johnson. Knoppers argues that the prohibition of intermarriage in the Second Temple period is related to the preservation of the "holy seed"; therefore, it is linked to genealogical purity (Knoppers, 2001:28). Likewise, E. Hayes contends that in the Second Temple period, the idea of genealogical purity was used to construct the identity of Jews as well as to create a boundary between Judeans and non-Judeans. She argues that the idea of the holy seed of all Israelites was an innovation of Ezra (Hayes, 2002:10) and that he advanced a view that the holy seed should be separated from the "profane seed", which referred to non-Judeans. Therefore, according to the book of Ezra, the genealogical holiness of Israelites, as well as the genealogical profaneness of non-Judeans, prohibited non-Judeans from becoming Judeans through intermarriage or any other means of conversion (Hayes, 2002a:193-194). This idea of all Israelites being holy seed, was further developed by the later Jewish traditions such as Jubilees and 4QMMT. In this Jewish tradition, however, Ezra and Nehemiah's reason for prohibiting intermarriage (profanation of the holy seed) changes to defilement of the holy seed (Hayes, 2002:230-231).<sup>35</sup> However, Hayes argues that the prohibition of intermarriage based on the idea of genealogical impurity of non-Judeans was not the main reason in rabbinic tradition; the main reason was the moral impurity of non-Judeans, which would not permanently prohibit assimilation of non-Judeans into Jewish societies (Hayes, 2002:96).

H. Washington (2003:430-431) opines that the community's holiness and fear of contamination is the reason behind the ban on intermarriage in Ezra 9-10. The community's holiness was in danger, because "the holy race has intermingled with the peoples of the lands" (Ezra 9:2 NAS) and the land was contaminated by the sin of the people of the land. Therefore, those who returned from exile under Ezra and Nehemiah, considered themselves as a remnant (cf. Ezra 9:8) surrounded by the people of the land, which was their main cause of anxiety. They feared that intermarriage would make the distinction from the people of the land unclear and might endanger their freedom from the Persian empire (Washington, 2003:429-430). Philp Esler also argues that the reason behind the ban on intermarriage in Ezra 9-10 was not because the

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<sup>35</sup> While profanation of the holy seed means to view the holy seed as common, defilement of the holy seed means transforming the pure seed into impure seed.

alien wives were idolatrous, but because intermarriage would make indistinct the difference between the returning community and the people of the land. Their ethnic identity would be endangered (Esler, 2003:421).

On the other hand, Saul Olyan contends that in the final form of Ezra and Nehemiah the issue of non-Judean impurity is expressed in the innovative and complex exegesis of some Old Testament texts (cf. Lev. 18:24-30; Deut. 23:4-9; and Deut. 7:1-6). The main ideology assumed in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, is the ideology of alien pollution, i.e., an alien who worships God, alien women married to Judeans, and their children, fall in this category (Olyan, 2004:2-4).

Hannah K. Harrington, after analysing Qumranic texts, notes that though both Judeans and non-Judeans are addressed in terms of impurity, while the impurity of Jews could be abolished by the ritual purification process, the non-Judeans would not be fully cleansed even after they performed the purification rites. Therefore, through the ritual purification process, Judeans could be fully admitted into the society and acquire full membership status in the community, but non-Judean converts would never have the same status as Judeans in the community, even if they underwent a purification process. Therefore, Harrington contends that non-Judeans were not fully accepted and assimilated into the Qumran community (Harrington, 2000:127).

Sylvester Johnson agrees with Hayes, Washington, and Esler, that the idea of linking Israel's identity with genealogical purity emerged during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. He contends that in ancient Israel, their divine identity (being a people of God) was not equated with the Israelites' biological purity. However, from the time of Ezra and Nehemiah the divine identity of Israel was equated with biological purity, the genealogical identity of Israel (Johnson, 2005:28).

Matthew Thiessen, in the book in which he addresses the role of circumcision in defining Jewish identity, argues that the distinction between non-Judeans and Judeans was not eradicated by the rite of circumcision. He contends that the difference between non-Judeans and Israel was genealogical and therefore permanent. Thus, there was no "possibility that non-Judeans can become part of Israel" (Thiessen, 2010:83). Furthermore, in the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.E. and the 1<sup>st</sup>

century C.E. genealogical purity was used as a means of exclusion of Gentiles from the Jewish community (Thiessen, 2011:436).

From the above scholars' discussions, one can see that there are three possible kinds of non-Judean impurity: ritual, moral, and genealogical impurity. It is also important to note the time frame in which particular ideas of impurity developed, and particularly that the innovative idea of Judean genealogical purity during the time of Ezra-Nehemiah was intended to exclude non-Judeans from their community and marked the boundary of the Judean community.

### **5.3.2. Assimilation of non-Judeans through intermarriage or proselytisation**

The previous section examined scholars' discussions on how Judeans perceived the non-Judeans in terms of purity/impurity and identified three main categories depending on the time frame—ritual, moral, and genealogy impurity. As Hayes rightly says,

Different views on the question of Gentile impurity entailed different definitions of group identity and served to construct group boundaries of varying degrees of permeability. Consequently, ancient Jews exhibit very different attitudes toward the two processes by which group boundaries are penetrated—intermarriage and conversion (Hayes, 2002:4-5).

However, scholars debate the period when conversion or proselytisation of non-Judeans started. After analysing the historical evidence from the Hellenistic and Roman periods, such as evidence from the history of Josephus Flavius, Shaye J.D. Cohen argues that the earliest proof of conversion of non-Judeans is in 128 B.C.E., when the Hasmoneans overtook the Idumeans and gave them the option of becoming Jews by accepting the Jewish rite of circumcision and customs of living (Josephus Flavius, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 13:257-258). A similar incident is reported with the conversion of Ituraea in 104-103 B.C.E. (Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 13:318) (Cohen, 1999:110-119).

According to Cohen, there are six ways in which the non-Judeans showed their attraction to Judaism: appreciating some part of Judaism; recognising the intensity of the power of the Jews' God or fusing Him with their gods; profiting the Jews, or being prominently benevolent to Jews; accepting and being involved in the customs of the Jews; worshiping the God of the Jews and disregarding the other gods; being included in the Jewish community and being

converted or becoming a Jew.<sup>36</sup> However, his analysis covers predominantly the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Though Daniel L. Smith-Christopher did a brief survey of how non-Judeans were excluded, converted, and included into the post-exilic Judean community during the biblical period (Smith-Christopher, 2002:117-142), his main emphasis is on the post-exilic period. Alexandru Mihăilă also analysed the Old Testament books and identified numerous ways by which non-Judeans were included in the Israelite community. However, his analysis assumes the conceptual distinction between ethnic assimilation and conversion (Mihăilă, 2011:28):

- (1) Reckoning with the power of a certain god. This is not a conversion per se and the person who admits the miracles of a particular god might maintain his religious allegiance and the former way of life.<sup>37</sup>
- (2) Adherence to a monolatrous religion.<sup>38</sup>
- (3) Incorporation into the social/ethnic community, especially through intermarriage. This assimilation presupposed that the wife adopted her husband's religious customs.<sup>39</sup>
- (4) Forced conversion dictated by political or social settings.<sup>40</sup>
- (5) Voluntary conversion to a monotheist religion without ethnic assimilation. (6)

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<sup>36</sup> Becoming Judean could be a result of: the conversion of a whole family; slaves being secured by a Jew; conversion for the sake of marrying a Jewish woman; forced conversion; a Gentile woman marrying a Jew; and so on.

<sup>37</sup> In Ex. 18:9-12 the Midianite priest Jethro brought sacrifices to Yahweh; Rahab recognised the power of the God of Israel (Josh. 2:9-12) as did the Queen of Sheba (1 Kgs. 10:9), Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 2:47; 3:28-29; 4:31, 34) and Darius (6:27-28).

<sup>38</sup> 2 Kgs. 5:15, 17 documents the story of an Aramean officer who was healed by the prophet Elisha; however, nothing in the story indicates that he abandoned his god, Rimmon/Ramman, and started worshipping only Yahweh. Rather, in the syncretistic context he probably started sacrificing to Yahweh in addition to his own other gods.

<sup>39</sup> The story of Ruth the Moabite is the best example of this category. In the ancient androcentric society in which a woman left her own family and joined the family of her husband, Ruth's conversion was related to commitment to her husband's family (Marsman, 2003: 67).

<sup>40</sup> There is no evidence of such a kind of conversion in the Old Testament, but it is clearly described in the history of Josephus Flavius.

Voluntary conversion to a monotheist religion and the assimilation into the ethnic community of Israel.<sup>41</sup>

From Mihăilă's list of how non-Judeans were included in the Israelite community, forced conversion and voluntary conversion accompanied by ethnic assimilation are not attested to in Hebrew Scriptures. While the former is clearly documented in the history of Josephus Flavius and the post-exilic Jewish literature, it is not found in the Hebrew Bible.

This is further attested to by the two words גֵר (*gēr*) and לָוִי (*lāwā*) in the Hebrew Bible, which describe the relationship between the Israelite community and the aliens living among them. The term “proselyte” has passed through different stages, which need careful analysis to understand its usage in the Old Testament books as well as in Judaism. The term proselyte is a translation of a Greek word προσελυτος, which is the LXX translation of the Hebrew word גֵר (*gēr*), “a word designating a resident alien or sojourner in the land”. Old Testament scholars have been arguing about the significant development of the meaning of the term throughout the history of Judaism. Some argue that in the literature of the monarchic period such as Deuteronomic and Deuteronomistic redaction, the term connotes a resident in the land of Judah, but in post-exilic literature, in the Priestly redaction and Holiness Code, it is associated with foreigners among the Israelite community who acquire equal status with the Israelites (Mihăilă, 2011:43). Others like Ramírez Kidd contend that the presence of גֵר in the Holiness Code does not necessarily mean that the *gērim* among the people of Israel were integrated with them (Ramírez Kidd, 1999: 56). On the other hand, Eyal Regev contends that the idea of holiness is different in Priestly and Deuteronomistic materials. While in Deuteronomistic material holiness is portrayed statically and allows the גֵר (*gēr*) to live among the Israelites without affecting the holiness of the community, in Priestly material holiness is depicted as contingent; therefore, the *gēr* should abide by the Holiness Code to live among them, so that they will not affect the holiness of the land (Regev, 2001:243-261). Thus, the purpose of the Holiness Code is not related to the integration of the גֵר (*gēr*), rather it is linked with the preservation of the purity of the community. It is not related to the conversion of the גֵר (*gēr*) into the religion of Israelites or to their integration into the Israelite community either.

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<sup>41</sup> This kind of conversion was not available in the Old Testament.

To conclude, the usage of גֵּר (*gēr*) in the Hebrew Bible shows neither religious conversion nor integration into the community with ethnic assimilation conclusively, while the usage of לָוִי (*lāwā*) in Isa. 53:3, 6; Zech. 2:15; Isa. 14:1 shows the presence of religious conversion in the Hebrew Bible (Kellermann, 1995: 476). Therefore, it is possible to safely conclude that the usage of לָוִי (*lāwā*) in the Hebrew Bible indicates the existence of religious conversion without ethnic assimilation.

Furthermore, I contend that before the time of Ezra-Nehemiah, the ban on intermarriage was on the grounds of morals and religion; however, from the time of Ezra-Nehemiah, another basis for a ban on intermarriage was established in the Judean community,—the genealogical purity of Judeans. This is supported by Jewish scholars Marsh and Levin, who compared the books of Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah and conclude that “the Chronicler did not consider such marriages to be problematic for the continued existence of the people of Israel or of the Yehud community in his own time. In this, he [the chronicler] represents an attitude that is very different than [from] that reflected in Ezra-Nehemiah” (Marsh and Levin, 2018:125). This ideological shift is clear in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah as well as Jubilees and 4QMMT. Therefore, I contend that before the time of Ezra-Nehemiah non-Judeans had been assimilated into the Judean community through marriage.

In the Pentateuch there are a few passages (cf. Ex. 34:15-16, Deut. 7:1-4) often cited in association with a ban on intermarriage with non-Judeans. However, Hayes as well as Klawans rightly argue that these passages explicitly state that the basis for the ban on intermarriage with the surrounding nations was mainly linked with their moral impurity (Hayes, 2002:45; Klawans, 2000:45). Genealogical purity was expected only from the high priest, according to Lev. 21:13-15 (Hayes, 2002:24). Therefore, it is possible to conclude that the absence of the universal ban on intermarriage between Judeans and non-Judeans in the Pentateuch means that in this period it was possible for non-Judeans to be assimilated into the Judean community through marriage.

The other passage which is related to the ban on intermarriage is found in Ezra 9:1-2 and Nehemiah 13, which base the ban on the genealogical purity of the Judeans. While in the Pentateuch only the marriage of the high priest with a non-Judean was seen as a profanation of the holy seed (Lev. 21:15), in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah the intermarriage between ordinary Judeans and non-Judeans was considered a profanation; in these books the idea of holy seed expanded to represent not only the high priest but also the whole Judean population.

### 5.3.3. Reinterpretation of the Torah as a boundary marker for Judeans

In Jewish tradition in both the post-exilic and pre-exilic periods, the issue of whether non-Judeans could acquire Judean identity, or in Deuteronomy's terminology, "enter the assembly of the LORD", often revolved around the interpretation of texts like Deut. 7:1 and 23:3. In the Mishnah, for instance, this verse is used as a boundary which determines who is allowed to enter into "the assembly of the LORD" — הָאָסֶפֶת הַלַּהֲוִי (cf. Deut. 23:4). Furthermore, the Mishnah attempts to solve the problem related to the admission of an Ammonite or a Moabite based on gender distinction (see *m.Yebamot* 8:3). The *Targum of Ruth* 2:10-11 also attempts to solve a dilemma similar to the above argument.

As shown in these few samples of later Jewish tradition, Jewish rabbis attempted to interpret Deut. 23:3 in a way that would allow the inclusion of non-Judeans into their community. However, there is another Jewish tradition that forbids the entrance or assimilation of non-Judeans into the Judean community. For instance, in Neh. 13:1-3 and Ezra 9:12 and 10-11 the idea stated in Deut. 23:3 is interpreted in a way that sets a clear distinction between the Judeans and the "people of the land".

Ezra 9:1-2 includes the author's exegetical innovation or reinterpretation of the Pentateuchal ban on intermarriage, merging the list of the names from Deut. 7:1 (the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites) and Deut. 23:3 (the Ammonites, and the Moabites). In Ezra 9:1-2, the Law, which was originally intended to prevent marriage between the Israelites and the surrounding peoples, is reinterpreted to address the socio-political and religious context of Ezra's time. This reinterpretation is evidenced by the inclusion of the nation Egypt, which was not included in the original Pentateuchal ban on intermarriage (Williamson, 1985: 130-131). Furthermore, while the basis for prohibiting marriage with the surrounding nations in the Pentateuch was their ability to lead the Israelites to idolatry, in Ezra it is linked with the people identified as the holy seed. Therefore, it is possible to say that Ezra reinterpreted the Pentateuchal law of prohibition of intermarriage in a way that fitted his contemporary social, political, and religious needs.

In the book of Ezra, the people of the land who are mentioned in Ezra 3:3 and 4:4 are depicted as being in conflict with "the people of exile" (Ezra 4:1), "the people of Judea" (Ezra 4:4) or "the holy seed" (Ezra 9:2). In the above passage, the author of the book of Ezra used



priestly language to explain the incongruity of intermarriage between the people of the land and the people of Judea, e.g., the holy race/seed (עַמִּי הַקֹּדֶשׁ), comparing the people of Judea with abominations (תּוֹעֵבֹת), uncleanness (בְּגָדָה) and impurity (בְּטָמְאוּת). The blending of the two (cf. Ezra 9:2) is seen as an attack on the identity of the Judean people; therefore, the proposed solution of the author is entire separation (בְּדִלּוּל). Morton Smith argues that the reinterpretation of the Law in the book of Nehemiah is situated within the purity and impurity ideology (Smith, 1971: 27-28). However, though recently refuted by other scholars (Janzen, 2007: 56), Joseph Blenkinsopp links the Law on the prohibition of intermarriage in the book of Ezra and Nehemiah with economic advantage (Blenkinsopp, 1988: 176). On the other hand, Smith-Christopher argues that, while in the book of Nehemiah (specifically Neh. 13) the prohibition of intermarriage is linked to his contemporary political problems, in the book of Ezra the main issue is related to the internal Jewish debate on the identity of the “true Jew” (Smith-Christopher, 1994: 257). Similarly, S. Talmon and Joseph Blenkinsopp also associate the prohibition with the purity of the Jewish people. Talmon says, “[t]he reason commonly urged is that the Jews would have no dealings with this mixed-race, being solicitous for pure people and a pure religion” (cf. Blenkinsopp, 1990:5-20).

As Michael Fishbane correctly points out, the proposed solution for the apparent problem is based on a reinterpretation of Deut. 23:3. He writes, “the mechanism for prohibiting intermarriage with the Ammonites, Moabites, etc. was an exegetical extension of the law in Deut. 7:1–3 effected by means of an adaptation and interpolation of features from Deut. 23: 4–9” (Fishbane, 1988:117).

The reinterpretation of the Law that prohibited intermarriage in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah is also observed by Juha Pakkala (2011). Furthermore, other scholars contend that in Ancient Near Eastern society there was no fixed law that could be used during jurisdiction; rather, laws were made instantaneously. Therefore, “Nehemiah, as Persian governor, had the right and ability to create law and its interpretation and to execute sanctions for its disobedience” (Watts, 2001: 87).

Thus, it is possible to conclude that the prohibition of intermarriage in Ezra and Nehemiah is a reinterpretation of Law from the perspective of purity/impurity ideology to preserve the Judean identity.

Here I can establish two of my arguments: (1) the implied author of the Gospel of Matthew was entering into the debate of reinterpretation of Torah and arguing that non-Judeans can enter into the community of the Lord without becoming Judean, that is, without undergoing the process of ethnic conversion; and (2) in the context of the Second Temple Judaism in which genealogical purity was used to define the identity of the Judean community, the implied author of the Gospel of Matthew included the names of the four non-Judeans, who were assimilated into the Jewish community through intermarriage, in his genealogical account, because their inclusion demonstrated the inclusive identity of the 1<sup>st</sup>-century followers of Christ. Therefore, one can safely say that the inclusion of the four non-Judeans in the genealogy of the Gospel of Matthew is opposed to the notion of genealogical purity of the Judeans as a community of the Lord, which was advocated from the time of Ezra and Nehemiah.

#### **5.4. The four non-Judeans and their assimilation through marriage**

In this section, I will argue that the four non-Judeans who are included in Matthew's genealogy were included in the community of Israel through intermarriage. Despite some Jewish traditions which ascribe proselyte status to Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Uriah, none of them are portrayed as proselytes in the biblical tradition. As argued above, even the idea of proselytisation of non-Judeans is a post-exilic notion.

##### **5.4.1. Tamar**

In early Jewish traditions, such as Jubilees 41:1-2, the *Testament of Judah*<sup>42</sup> 10:1-2, 6 as well as later Jewish traditions such as *b. Sotah* 10a,<sup>43</sup> *Targum Pseudo Jonathan* Gen. 28:24 and *Genesis Rabbah* 85:10, Tamar is depicted as a non-Judean of some sort, but the Scripture, including Genesis 38, is silent about her ethnicity.

Some Matthean scholars, on the basis of Jubilees 41:1 and the *Testament of Judah* 10:1-2, 6, consider Tamar as an Aramean without any further discussion (Brown, 2005: 72; (Brown, 1997: 72; Luz, 2007: 110; Johnson, 1969:159, 270; Heil, 1991:539). Their assumption is criticised by

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<sup>42</sup> Though the dating of the *Testament of Judah* is disputable, the appearance of the tradition in the book of Jubilees is evidence that the tradition about Tamar is an earlier one.

<sup>43</sup> *b. Sotah* 10a considers her as a proselyte Jew.

Richard Bauckham, who explains both passages within their context and argues that though she is a non-Judean just like other Jewish matriarchs, she is not an Aramean (Bauckham, 1995: 318). She is the granddaughter of Abraham's brother, Terah (cf. Gen. 22:21; Jub. 34:20, 41:1; *T. Jud.* 10:1). Therefore, he argues, "Tamar was at least no more a Gentile than Sarah, Rebekah, Leah and Rachel were" (Bauckham, 1995: 318). Bauckham contends that "if the Matthean genealogy presupposes this account of Tamar's ancestry, and since it does not include Sarah, Rebekah or Leah, the reason for Tamar's appearance in the genealogy cannot be that she was regarded as a Gentile" (Bauckham, 1995: 318).

However, other Jewish traditions such as the *Targum of Pseudo-Jonathan* (Gen. 38:6), *Genesis Rabbah* 85:10 and *Numbers Rabbah* 13:4, which may give a slight hint why the author of the Gospel of Matthew included her name in the genealogy. In these traditions, Tamar is depicted as the daughter of Shem, who in the later Jewish traditions is identified as Melchizedek (*Lev. Rab.* 25:6; *Num. Rab.* 4:8) (Bauckham, 1995:319). Bauckham says:

Since Genesis 38 gives no indication that Tamar came from outside Canaan, and implies that her 'father's house' (38:11) was in Canaan, this tradition makes her the daughter of the only worshipper of the true God, apart from the family of Abraham, who could then have been found in Canaan: Shem-Melchizedek. (Bauckham, 1995:319)

Regardless of Bauckham's argument that this tradition does not offer "plausible reason for Tamar's inclusion in the Matthean genealogy" (Bauckham, 1995:319), I contend that if she was a Canaanite woman and the daughter of Melchizedek, who worshipped God despite not being part of the family of Abraham, this indicates that being part of God's people is not always dependent on being of the Abrahamic line. The author of the Gospel of Matthew probably included Tamar's name in his genealogical account in line with this Jewish tradition, which did not necessarily link the identity of God's people to the Abrahamic line as its background.

Bauckham, using Philo, Matthew's contemporary, as evidence (see *Virt.* 220-222), argues that Tamar was a proselyte, a Canaanite woman who was converted because of her marriage (Bauckham, 1995:319). Nonetheless, several questions need to be addressed: Why did the implied author of the gospel include a proselyte person in his genealogy? Is he encouraging the proselytisation process? Does the implied author always conform to the contemporary

assumption? What if the implied author of the Gospel of Matthew wanted to confront those contemporary assumptions? In the light of the overall context of the gospel, this does not seem to be the reason behind the inclusion of Tamar in the genealogy, for throughout the gospel the author does not develop the theme of proselytisation. Rather, her inclusion seems related to being a worshiper of God without having the genealogical lineage of a member of the covenant people.

The above discussion shows that Tamar was included in the covenant line through intermarriage. However, her conversion through marriage was not the only reason for her inclusion into the genealogy; rather, being a worshiper of God before having any relationship with the Abrahamic lineage is probably the reason why the author of the Gospel of Matthew included her in his genealogical account. Despite some Jewish traditions which portray her as a proselyte, the author of the Gospel of Matthew seems to have attempted to call into memory the older traditions, which is her assimilation into the covenant line through intermarriage.

#### 5.4.2. Rahab

The inclusion of Rahab in the Matthean genealogy is problematic in many ways, such as the problem related to the spelling of her name, the chronological problem, and who she married (see Bauckham, 2002:36-37). Even though the Old Testament does not mention anything about Rahab's marriage, in some Jewish traditions, particularly in *b. Meg 14b-15a*, she is mentioned as married to Joshua. Bauckham contends that rabbinic exegetical traditions of 1 Chr. 4:21 in *Ruth Rab.* 2.1 and *Sifre Num.* 78 presuppose that she married Joshua (Bauckham, 2002:38). On the other hand, Marshall D. Johnson contends that according to the rabbinic exegetical traditions of 1 Chr. 4:21 in *Ruth Rab.* 2.1 and *Sifre Num.* 78, Rahab was married to the tribe of Judah (Johnson, 1969). Most of the mentioned problems are not related to the topic of this study; therefore, I will not attempt to address them. However, all Matthean scholars agree that her origin was non-Judean.

The question related to this study is whether she is a proselyte or a גֵּר (gēr). A גֵּר (gēr) was a non-Judean living within the Jewish community without becoming a Judean. Johnson and Bauckham contend that the inclusion of Rahab in David's lineage is related to rabbinic traditions, such as *Num. Rab.* 9:9, which depict her as a proselyte (Bauckham, 2002:37; Johnson, 1969:165).

If one grants that the author of the gospel followed the Jewish traditions regarding Rahab being a proselyte, what point did he try to make by including the proselyte in Jesus' genealogy? It is hard to make a case for a theme of proselytisation of non-Judeans from the Matthean narrative; therefore, this could not be the reason for Rahab's inclusion nor the inclusion of the four non-Judeans in the genealogical account. Rather, there is some biblical evidence of the assimilation of non-Judeans into the community of Judeans, retaining their own ethnic identity without being a proselyte. For instance, the presence of the Rechabites among the Israelite community is mentioned in Josh. 6:25 and also Jer. 35. Similarly, the Gibeonites (cf. Josh. 9), Kenizzites (Josh. 24), and Kenites (Josh. 1:16) were living among the Israelites without becoming Jews through the proselytisation process. Therefore, it is probable that the inclusion of Rahab in the genealogy of Matthew related to her way of assimilating to the covenant line through intermarriage.

#### **5.4.3. Ruth**

Ruth is one of the non-Judean characters in the Old Testament narrative portrayed positively. In the narrative, she is depicted as fighting to survive in a patriarchal society. Some scholars argue that she had a religious conversion based on Ruth 1:16 (Freed, 1987: 8) and committed to living among foreign people in a foreign land, as described in Ruth 1. But, even after this assumed conversion, she is still recognised as "Ruth the Moabite" (Ruth 4:10). In later Jewish traditions, she is considered a proselyte (*B. Yeb.* 76b).

Was what happened according to Ruth 1:16 a religious conversion or an ethnic conversion? Some scholars argue that this verse shows that she denounced her ethnicity and religious identity and assumed both the ethnic and religious identity of her mother-in-law Naomi (Hubbard, 1988:117). Furthermore, after comparing the confession of Ruth with the story of the Aramean officer's confession in 2 Kgs. 5:15-17, Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor contend that both underwent ethnic conversion and became proselytes (Cogan and Tadmor, 1988:67). To the contrary, Edward F. Campbell argues that if the author of the book of Ruth wanted to convey an idea of conversion, in the sense of ethnic conversion or proselytisation, he would have stated it upfront. But it seems his main intention was to illustrate her loyalty to her mother-in-law. Therefore, from the story point of view, if one speaks about conversion, it should be from a religious point of view (Campbell, 2008: 80). André LaCocque says that the book of

Ruth in itself is evidence that she did not convert or change her ethnic identity because she was called Ruth the Moabite even at the end of the story (LaCocque, 2004: 52).

On the other hand, Neil Glover, after analysing the book of Ruth from an ethnographic literary point of view, argues that though Ruth showed her interest in entering the community of Israel, she became a member of the community after her desire was approved by the community in 4:13. Therefore, what is expressed in 1:16 is just her desire to be ethnically assimilated into the community (Glover, 2009:302).

From Mihăilă's analysis of conversion in Judaism, Ruth's story resembles assimilation into the community through intermarriage, and her religious conversion is related to her allegiance to her mother-in-law (Mihăilă, 2011:28). Therefore, it is possible to say that Ruth was religiously converted and assimilated into the Israelite community; however, there is no evidence that she changed her ethnic identity, her Moabite status.

Therefore, like the previously discussed persons, Tamar and Rahab, the inclusion of the name of Ruth in the genealogy of Matthew is related not to her being a proselyte, but to her assimilation into the Judean community through intermarriage.

#### **5.4.4. The wife of Uriah**

The reason why the author of the Gospel of Matthew did not directly mention Bathsheba, has puzzled Matthean scholars. While J. Schaberg and others say that the reason she is not mentioned by name is either that the author wanted to emphasise her adultery or make the point that, though she later married David, she was still a wife of Uriah (Schaberg, 1987: 29). Nolland also thinks that the indirect naming is related to David's sin and God's judgment (Nolland, 1997:527-539). Others argue that the reason is related to her being a Gentile (Brown, 2005: 72). However, the suggestion that she was a foreigner is rightly refuted by others on the basis that, according to 2 Sam. 11:3, her father, Eliam, was the son of Ahithophel (2 Sam. 23:34). Furthermore, in Jewish traditions like *b. Sanh. 101a* she is depicted as a daughter of Eliam (Bredin, 1996: 96-97). Therefore, she was an Israelite.

If she was Israelite by origin, why did the author of the Gospel of Matthew include her indirectly with the phrase "by the wife of Uriah"? I will argue that the author of the Gospel of Matthew intentionally included Uriah's wife in the genealogical account because Uriah was

known as a non-Judean character, who was assimilated into the Israelite community through intermarriage. Therefore, the implied author was probably intentionally refuting the necessity for genealogical purity of the Judean community by referring to such known characters from their traditions.

#### **5.4.5. Conclusion**

So far, I have argued that the insertion of the names of the four non-Judeans in the genealogy of Matthew expresses a polemic not only against the Judean parties who advocated the proselytisation of non-Judeans to be included in the community of Judeans, but also against those who advocated the ideological purity of the Judean community based on their genealogical purity. However, the implied author of the Gospel of Matthew refuted both arguments by demonstrating the non-existence of the idea of genealogical purity as well as proselytisation in the pre-exilic period using historical examples such as Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Uriah. By implication, he illustrated that non-Judeans in his time neither needed to go through the process of proselytisation to be God's people, nor should be denied the privilege of being God's people based on contemporary genealogical impurity ideology.

#### **5.4.6. Being people of God: Divine identity vs. biological identity or genealogical purity**

This section of the study will argue that the absence of the idea of Judean genealogical purity and that the proselytisation process was necessary to be admitted into the Judean community in the pre-exilic period, has ramifications for the identity of the people of God. The theme of the people of God is one of the most common themes in both the Old and New Testaments. In both testaments, being the people of God is associated with the identity bestowed upon certain people by God; therefore, it is a divine identity. Sylvester Johnson contends that the idea of divine identity is related to the way a society represents itself through theological history as a people of God (Johnson, 2005:26). Therefore, the theme of divine identity in the biblical narrative assumes a society who thought of themselves as a people of God as compared to other peoples whom the Judeans believed were not people of God. Johnson emphasises that “those who possess divine identity are fundamentally, *necessarily* set apart from those who are not divinely identified, who are not people of God” (Johnson, 2005:26).

In the pre-exilic period of Judean tradition, the divine identity, an identity bestowed upon certain people by God, was located in the “ideological and cultic/[religious] purity of Judeans” (Johnson, 2005:28). Gary N. Knoppers (2001:18) also argues that the Judean community before the exilic period was ethnically diversified in that “[t]he genealogies of Judah manifest substantial social, ethnic, and geographic diversity”.

However, in the narrative of Ezra 8:35-10:44, this inclusive trend of Judean identity has been substituted by a more exclusive identity. The author of the book of Ezra advanced the idea of the divine identity of the people of God who returned from the Babylonian exile. The main emphasis of this corpus is the ethnic purification of the people. The problem is that “the holy seed has mixed itself with the peoples of the land”, which should be understood in the light of Deut. 7:1. However, Ezra 9:10-12 and 10:2-3 introduce a new idea of correlating the divine identity of the people of God with the biological or genealogical purity of the people. Here, the idea of holy seed is introduced, which redefines the ground for their separation. Therefore, in the narratives of Ezra, the divine identity of the people of God is not connected to the ideological and cultic purity of the people; it is related to biological purity, which is perpetuated through holy seed.

Johnson and Hays rightly point out that Ezra’s emphasis on the biological purity of the people of God is a departure from the old tradition, which associated the divine identity of the people of God with the religion of Israel (Johnson, 2005:28; Hayes, 2002). Knoppers argues that in the pre-exilic period Judah was ethnically diverse, and even included Moabites, Edomites, and Egyptians; therefore, this ethnic diversity and multifaceted ancestry in itself is evidence against the notion of the biological or genealogical purity of Israel, as advocated by Ezra and Nehemiah (Knoppers, 2001).

#### **5.4.7. Jesus and “his brothers” as the reconstituted or restored Israel**

Steven B. Bryan (2019:294) recently published an article in which he argues that the triadic Matthean genealogical scheme which lacks “one generation in the third table” is “literary genius” through which the implied author launched “an argument that the identity of this people has never simply been a matter of ancestry”. Furthermore, he contends that



If ‘Judah and his brothers’ in the first table of the genealogy represent Israel in its original constitution and ‘Jeconiah and his brothers’ represent Israel in its experience of national judgment and dissolution, the depiction of the Twelve as the resurrected Christ and his brothers at the end of the narrative represents Israel in its reconstitution (Bryan, 2019: 294).

The first table (Matt. 1:2-6a) represents Israel in its original constitution. In this first table, we find the phrase “Judah and his brothers” (Matt. 1:2) which “represents the nation in its original constitution” (Bryan, 2019: 301). Bryan further argues that the source for the genealogy of the Gospel of Matthew is 1 Chronicle, in which not only the universal scope of genealogy is reflected but also “there are significant links between the universal genealogy of 1 Chr 1 and the genealogy of Judah” (Bryan, 2019: 301). The shift from universal to particular scope “highlights an ominous feature of Israel’s national identity” (Bryan, 2019: 301). Furthermore, in this source, the sons of Judah, Perez, and Zarah, from Tamar, are compared with the three sons of Judah, from Beth-shua, which represents the inclusion and exclusion dimensions respectively. Bryan highlights the reason for this:

Within the first few lines of Judah’s genealogy, the Chronicler notes not only the unexpected incorporation of Tamar but also the cutting off of descendants from Judah’s clan. Both dimensions of the Chronicler’s genealogical annotations are pulled forward into the annotations of Matthew’s genealogy with the inclusion of Tamar and the reference to Zerah. (Bryan, 2019: 301)

Therefore,

Matthew may have added Zerah because of the contrast established by the Chronicler between Perez and Zerah on the one hand and their three brothers born to Beth-shua, wife of Judah, on the other. If so, Zerah serves as the first of a trio of markers within the genealogy of a theme that Matthew will develop—that the reconstitution of Israel will entail not only the inclusion of the unexpected (as represented by the women in the genealogy) but also the exclusion of those who do not do the will of the Father. (Bryan, 2019:303-304)

As discussed, Bryan notes that the inclusion of the names of Tamar and Zerah in the first triad of the Matthean genealogy evokes the theme of inclusion and exclusion. Though he does not push further on the identity of those who will be included other than a general reference to “the inclusion of the unexpected”, I argue that the inclusion of the names of the non-Judeans Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth in the first triad indicates an aspect of the identity of those who will be included in the reconstitution of Israel.

Furthermore, Bryan (2019:311) contends that the theme of the reconstitution of Israel evoked by the missing generation in the third triad of the Matthean genealogy (Matt. 1:11-16) “anticipates the narrative’s concern with Israel’s reconstitution... The missing generation at the end of the third table constitutes a gap that Matthew both depicts and fills by means of his narrative” (Bryan, 2019: 311).

Throughout the narrative, Matthew develops the theme of the reconstitution of Israel through the appointment of the twelve disciples over Israel (Matt. 12:28; cf. 10:6) referred to by Jesus as “my brothers” (Matt. 28:10), who “collectively represent the fulfilment of prophetic hopes for the restoration of Israel” (Bryan, 2019:311, 12). Furthermore,

The narrative has prepared the reader for this identification by posing a question regarding the identity of Jesus’s brothers in 12:46-50. There, Jesus rebuffs his mother and brothers, who stand “outside,” and designates the disciples among the crowds as “my mother and my brothers” (12:48-49), the familial relations of the one who is “greater than Solomon” (12:42) are defined by “whoever does the will of my father” (12:50). (Bryan, 2019: 312)

Thus, the missing generation at the end of the third table is filled by Jesus calling his disciples “my brothers” who collectively play the role of the reconstituted Israel. “If, as the first table of the genealogy indicates, the original constitution of Israel as the Twelve comprised ‘Judah and his brothers,’ so now with the exaltation of Jesus, Israel’s reconstitution as the messianic people is represented by ‘Jesus and his brothers’” (Bryan, 2019: 313).

Therefore, as Israel’s identity in its original constitution (as well as in its national judgment and desolation) was not solely based on genealogical purity, i.e., they were mingled with non-Judeans, it follows that non-Judeans should also be allowed to be a part of

reconstituted Israel based on another rationale, by their association with the Messiah. Thus, in the social context in which genealogical purity was given prominence, the implied author used the non-Judean characters in the genealogy to reshape the social makeup of reconstituted Israel, the ideal readers' community. Olmstead successfully argues of the three parables in Matt. 21:28-22:14 that "[t]he fruit of repentance becomes the mark of Yahweh's eschatological people. The nation is judged. The nations are included in the reconstituted people of God" (Olmstead, 2003: 27).

#### **5.4.8. The four non-Judeans in the Matthean genealogy and their symbolic signification: A semiological analysis**

##### **5.4.8.1. Introduction**

Many Matthean scholars have studied the inclusion of unexpected non-Judeans from different perspectives. However, their inclusion in the genealogy and the implications for forming the identity of the readers from the semiological perspective, have not been studied yet. Therefore, in this section, I will endeavour to read the inclusion of the four non-Judeans using Barthes' semiological reading as a heuristic tool to investigate its role in shaping the identity of the ideal readers' community.

##### **5.4.8.2. First semiological order**

As discussed in Chapter Three, the first semiological order is the meaning of the story in its narrative world. The meaning that the implied author wanted to communicate to the implied readers through this genealogy is that Jesus is the anticipated Messiah in whom the story of Israel culminates. Therefore, in the first order of semiological reading of the Matthean genealogy, the list of names, which is structured in three tables that include the four non-Judeans, is a signifier. Its aim is to signify the summary of the history of Israel (Israel in its constitution, judgment, and reconstitution) and the messianic identity of Jesus, who came to bring the restoration of Israel to reality. The sign of the first order is the combination of the signifier and the idea that it signifies, thus, the list of names structured in a triad of fourteen names were intended to communicate a message that Jesus is the anticipated Messiah who came to bring to fulfilment the restoration of Israel.

*First order meaning: signifier* (the four mentioned non-Judeans in Matthean genealogy account) + *signified* (the summary of the history of Israel (Israel in its constitution, judgment, and reconstitution) and the messianic identity of Jesus, who came to bring about the restoration of Israel) = *the sign* (the genealogy account which includes individual non-Judeans indicates Jesus is the anticipated Messiah who came to bring to fulfilment the restoration of Israel).

#### **5.4.8.3. The second semiological order**

The signifier of the second semiological order is the sign or signification of the first order but in its empty form. The signification of the first semiological order, after emptying what it signifies,<sup>44</sup> in its empty form<sup>45</sup> became the signifier of the second semiological order.

As seen in Chapter Three, the signifier of the second order is the signification of the first order in its empty form. It is filled with an idea that emanated from the social circumstances in which the story was written. In the context of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, when the identity of the people of God was contestable, the idea or the concept that the genealogy intended to signify, is related to who the people of God are. The three tables of the genealogy represent three periods of Israel's story (constitution, dissolution, and reconstitution); however, in all periods, Israel's identity is not solely biological but also related to their allegiance to the God of Israel. Therefore, the implied author used the genealogy of Jesus to refute the existing argument that related to the identity of God's people in terms of genealogical purity. By including unexpected non-Judeans in the genealogy, the implied author propagated the idea that the identity of the people of God is a matter of allegiance.

As shown in the section above (see 5.2.), in ancient society genealogy was used to evoke the whole history of the society and could be used as a polemic against existing ideology. Therefore, the second order sign or the mythological signification of the Matthean genealogy is summarising Israel's story by dividing it into different stages (constitution, dissolution, and

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<sup>44</sup> The history of Israel and the messianic identity of Jesus.

<sup>45</sup> The list of names in the genealogy (including the names of the four non-Judeans), which is structured in three triads of fourteen names.

reconstitution) in which the implied author used the non-Judean characters as a polemic against the idea of genealogical purity of the community by demonstrating the assimilation of non-Judeans into the community, even from the inception of the community.

Therefore, the sign/signification of the second semiological order is that the list of names, specifically the inclusion of the names of the four non-Judeans in the genealogy, which is structured in three triads each consisting of fourteen names, aimed to refute an ideology that propagated the biological purity of Judeans and hindered non-Judean assimilation into the community. The triadic structure of the genealogy was intended to summarise the identity of Israel in three historical stages.

*Second order meaning: signifier* (the genealogy account which includes the four non-Judeans is intended to show Jesus is the anticipated Messiah who came to bring to fulfilment the restoration of Israel) + *signified* (the inclusion of the individual non-Judeans signifies that non-Judeans are part of this restoration of Israel) = *sign* (the inclusion of the individual non-Judeans in the genealogy indicates Jesus' messianic vocation is for the whole world, which signifies his salvific vocation is not confined to Judeans).

Therefore, because the story implies a change in the composition of the recipients of the messianic blessings, it has an identity-forming role. It reshapes the constitution of the recipients of the messianic blessings; thus, it redefines the identity of the people of God, who are ultimately the recipients of the messianic blessings.

In addition to their being non-Judeans, the common feature of the four mentioned names in the genealogical account is their assimilation into the Judean community through intermarriage. I argued that their inclusion in the genealogical account is also related to intermarriage, not proselytisation. In the pre-exilic period, nothing permanently prohibited people from other nations from being assimilated into the Judean community. Therefore, the author of the Gospel of Matthew used this common feature, intermarriage, to argue against those who advocated assimilation through proselytisation as well as those who said that non-Judeans could not enter into the Judean community by any means.

Hence, the inclusion of the four non-Judeans in the genealogical account might also be related to indicating that the addressed community should have an inclusive identity. I will argue that by using the names of four non-Judeans who were assimilated into the Judean community through intermarriage, the author of the Gospel of Matthew redefined the identity of the people of God. The four non-Judeans in the genealogical account are symbolic representational characters, who were depicted positively by the implied author, to reconstruct the identity of the ideal readers' community in comparison with the alternative community, who probably advocated for the genealogical purity of the people of God. The implied author of the Gospel of Matthew used these four non-Judeans, who exhibited extra allegiance and acknowledgment of the God of Israel, as symbolic representative characters pointing to the inclusion of non-Judeans into the ideal readers' community.

#### **5.4.9. The four non-Judeans in the Matthean genealogy and their role in forming the identity of the readers**

If the implied author of the Gospel of Matthew used the genealogy to assert the idea of the reconstitution of God's people or Israel based on their allegiance to God, this changed the way the community should think of themselves. It shows that the implied author embarked on the project of reshaping the identity of the community, of who would be beneficiaries of the blessings that the Messiah brought. I have argued that the inclusion of the four non-Judeans suggests the composition of the community should not be based on ethnic identity, but rather based on allegiance to God. Therefore, it is a trans-ethnic identity. The boundary marker is drawn in terms of ethnic categorisation: neither Judeans nor non-Judeans. The implied author used Judean traditions to define the identity of the ideal readers' community.

#### **5.4.10. Conclusion**

In this chapter, I attempted to read the genealogy of Matthew from the perspective of the function of genealogy as a myth of origin. This helps us to better understand the inclusion of the four non-Judeans in the genealogy of Matthew. The naming of the four non-Judeans in the genealogy should be understood in the light of the Second Temple debate over the genealogical purity of Judeans. Furthermore, I contended that the basis for the concept of genealogical purity of Judeans is a reinterpretation of the Torah.

The study demonstrated that the author of the Gospel of Matthew used these names as an identity marker. Unlike the contemporary Judean community, the author of the gospel used these names to justify the inclusivity of the addressed communities. I have also shown that the author of the gospel established his case by engaging in the debate through the reinterpretation of the Torah. Furthermore, the names of the non-Judeans in the genealogical account served as a polemic against those who were advocating for the proselytisation of non-Judeans to be a part of the community of beneficiaries, as well as those who prohibited any relationship between the Judeans and non-Judeans based on the assumption of their community's genealogical purity. Similarly, the inclusion of the non-Judeans in the genealogy served to redefine the identity of the beneficiaries community as people of God, not in terms of genealogical purity but, like pre-exilic Israel, in terms of religious and moral purity.

This conclusion is further attested to by reading the genealogy with Barthes' semiological reading. Though in the first mythological order the sign—the genealogy of Jesus—attests to the messianic identity of Jesus and the climax of the Israel story, in its second order semiological system the genealogy conveys the message of identity—the identity of a restored Israel that includes non-Judeans. Therefore, the inclusion of the non-Judeans in the genealogy indicates who will be allowed in the community. This is the way in which the implied author constructed the identity of the ideal community. Therefore, the four non-Judeans in the genealogy account redefine the identity of God's people as well as its entry requirements.

In the next chapter I will show how the implied author used the story of the Magi (Matt. 2:1-12) to form the identity of the ideal readers' community.

## Chapter Six

### 6. The Magi as non-Judean symbolic representatives: A case for the reconfiguration of God's people

#### 6.1. Introduction

The previous chapter researched the symbolic representational role of the four non-Judeans in the Matthean genealogical account in constructing the identity of the ideal readers' community, using as a heuristic tool the socio-narrative reading approach that is described in Chapter Three. I argued that, in the context in which genealogical purity and proselytisation was promoted, the inclusion of non-Judeans in the genealogy was aimed at defining the identity of the ideal readers' community, the identity of reconstituted Israel. In Chapter Four, I argued that Jesus' teaching characterised non-Judeans as stereotypical others, marking the boundary line between the ideal readers' community and non-Judeans in the light of their otherness.

In this chapter, I will address the other non-Judean group character, namely, the Magi found in Matt. 2:1-12. I will contend that the positive characterisation of the Magi in the narrative has a symbolic signification role, and this character was also used by the implied author to form the identity of the ideal readers' community.

Scholarly studies on the Magi in Matt. 2:1-12 often revolve around the historicity and the sources<sup>46</sup> from which the Gospel of Matthew inherited its traditions (Sim, 1999:981). Some Matthean scholars have denied the historical foundation of the event, repudiating the factual basis of the story of the Magi visiting the baby Jesus (cf. Hagner, 1994:25). The necessity of studies on the historicity and the source of the pericope is undeniable; however, the central focus of this section is on analysing the symbolic signification of the passage and its implications in forming the identity of the ideal reader.

This chapter will endeavour to read Matt. 2:1-12 using the socio-narrative reading method, which is described in Chapter Three, as a heuristic tool to see what the story signifies regarding the ideal readers. However, the study will not stop at identifying the symbolic

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<sup>46</sup> For discussion of the source of the pericope, see Nolland (1998:283-300).



signification of the story of the Magi; it will attempt to determine how the implied author used such symbolic signification to form the identity of the ideal readers' community. Therefore, the outcome of the reading mainly depends on the identity of the Magi—whether they were Judeans or non-Judeans. As many Matthean scholars have concluded that they were non-Judeans, two questions must be addressed: What does their inclusion in the story signify to the ideal readers; and How does this symbolic signification form the identity of the ideal readers? These two questions will be the focus of this section's analysis.

First, an attempt will be made to argue that the Magi mentioned in Matt. 2:1-12 are non-Judeans, using a syntactical and inter-textual reading tool. Then I will discuss how the implied author positively characterised the non-Judean Magi. After that, the symbolic signification of the literary unit will be studied using the socio-narrative reading method as a heuristic tool, and its implication for forming the identity of the ideal readers will be explicated. In this section using Barthes' semiological reading of the story of Magi in Matt. 2:1-12, I will argue that the second level semiological meaning of the coming of the Magi to worship the newly born Judean king, who is the saviour-king of the whole world, signifies that his salvific vocation is not confined to Judeans; non-Judeans also benefit from his coming; therefore, the coming of the Magi signifies the inclusion of non-Judeans.

## **6.2. The identity of the Magi: Judeans or non-Judeans?**

Though most modern Matthean scholars favour a non-Judean identification of the Magi (see Hagner, 1994:31; Gundry, 1994:26; Brown, 2005: 180-181, 183; Tisera, 1993:61, 73-75; Davies and Allison, 2004:228), others reject this conventional notion and argue for the Magi being Judeans (see Sim, 1999:980-1000; cf. Byrne, 2002:60; Lowtherclarke, 2007:44-45; Mann, 1958:495-500). Sim contends that in this episode of the narrative, the Matthean community is represented by the Magi and the homeland Judeans are represented by the people of Jerusalem (Sim, 1999:980-1000). Therefore, it is necessary to substantiate the claim that the Magi were non-Judeans before we proceed to discover the signification of their inclusion in the Matthean narrative.

G. Delling argues that throughout all ages the word *magi* denotes four meanings: a "member of the Persian priestly caste", "the possessor and user of supernatural knowledge and ability", "magician", and figuratively, "deceiver, seducer" (Delling, 1976:356-358). R.T. France

also contends that the word magi was “originally the name of a Persian priestly caste, but later used widely for magicians and astrologers (cf. Acts 13:6), a numerous class in most countries in Western Asia at that time” (France, 1985:81). They specialised in interpreting dreams, prophetic speech, enchanting, and exorcism (Boyce and Grenet, 1991:511-539). Leon Morris points out that “the word μάγος seems originally to have meant a member of the tribe of the *Magoi*; later it was used of a member of a sacred caste who carried on with Magian practices, and then it was used of sorcerers in general (Acts 13:6, 8)” (Morris, 1992: 35).

However, David Sim argues that by the time of Matthew, the meaning of the word was not necessarily tied to Persian priests, for there is ample evidence of incidences in which the word was used to refer to characters who were not Persian priests, e.g., Jewish magi are referred to in Acts 8:9-24, and 13:6-11, and Josephus’ *Antiquities* 20:142. Therefore, he contends, it is hard to accept the thesis that “magi in the Matthean infancy narrative were necessarily Gentiles” (Sim, 1999:985). Sim is right in arguing that in Matthew’s day the word magi was not necessarily attached to Persian priests, but, as M. David Litwa contends, it could mean magician or diviner (Litwa, 2019: 105). However, as C.S. Mann correctly notes, in the New Testament the term magi is always used pejoratively with a magician connection (Mann, 1958:496). Unlike the author of the book of Acts, the author of the Gospel of Matthew says nothing negative about the Magi, and his narrative describes them as interested in studying stars, like Persian priests. Furthermore, the presence of the word magi in the book of Acts and the Gospel of Matthew does not necessarily lead us to conclude that the word has a similar meaning in those different contexts. Therefore, the meaning the author of the Gospel of Matthew attached to the word magi is probably more closely related to its original meaning of Persian priest than that of magician. Unlike the way the word is used in the passage under consideration, in the other New Testament texts the word has a negative connotation, that of magicians. Furthermore, the association of stars with Persian priests, as well as the prophetic anticipation of the universal saviour-king, Saošyant (see 6.5.1), in their tradition suggests that the Matthean Magi were probably Persian priests.

Still, Sim contends that the Magi following the star does not necessarily lead us to conclude that they were non-Judeans, specifically Persian priests, because there is ample evidence in Jewish literature during the Hellenistic period of both Jewish assimilation of astrology (Sim, 1999:985-986). Furthermore, Sim argues, the most complete available Jewish

astrological book, *Treatise of Shem*, makes no reference to Jewish scriptures. Thus, we should not expect anything different from the Magi of the Gospel of Matthew (Sim, 1999:990). If many Jewish people in the Hellenistic period were interested in astrology, we have to reject an assumption that the Magi of the Gospel of Matthew could not have been Jews (Sim, 1999:986). J.H. Charlesworth likewise contends that “it is unwise to presuppose that Matthew’s wise men must be pagans because of their astrological beliefs” (Charlesworth, 1985:479). However, if the Magi’s choice to follow the star arose from their anticipation of the coming Messiah according to Jewish tradition, how they did not know the birthplace of the Messiah, who was the subject matter of their interest? And why did King Herod not seek an answer for the place of birth of the Messiah from them, rather than inquiring from the chief priests? Raymond E. Brown contends that “Matthew’s description of the Magi as interpreting the rise of the star tips the scales in favor of his considering them to be astrologers” (Brown, 2005:167). According to the picture the author of the Gospel of Matthew painted about the characters of both the Magi and the chief priests, it seems the Magi were more familiar with the stars, and the chief priests were more familiar with the Jewish scriptures.

The view that the Magi were non-Judean is supported by many modern Matthean scholars. For instance, Raymond Brown contends that the Magi “represent the best of pagan lore and religious receptivity that has come to seek Jesus through nature” (Brown, 2005: 158). Davies and Allison also argue that these “intellectual” men were non-Judean: “[t]hey are the mysterious wise foreigners who, having mastered secret lore, are able to recognize who it is that will be king” (Davies and Allison, 2004).

Sim objects to this notion too, based on the lack of scriptural knowledge on the grounds that in other New Testament references where the term is used, nothing indicates that those who were called magi had sufficient scriptural knowledge (Sim, 1999:989). However, the way the author of the Gospel of Matthew drew the characteristics of the Magi, seems to differ from references in the New Testament books. While Acts portrays them in pejorative terms, the author of the Gospel of Matthew describes them positively and this positive description is related to them seeking the Jewish anticipated Messiah. Furthermore, though in addition to some pseudepigraphal and apocryphal Jewish literature, Sim uses *Treaties of Shem* as evidence for the presence of astrological belief in Hellenistic Judaism, there is no evidence in these books that Jewish astrological studies were associated with their messianic expectations. However,

there is ample evidence in Greco-Roman literature in which the coming of the great king is reflected.

If the Magi were Jews and anticipated the coming of their Messiah, their anticipation must have been according to their tradition, which they must have known. If so, Herod would have submitted his inquiry to them. However, in addition to the positive evidence exhibited in the Greco-Roman literature regarding their anticipation of a great king, the absence of evidence which shows a link between Jewish astrological studies and their messianic expectation, and the Magi's lack of knowledge of this tradition (as proven by Herod not seeking the answer for the birthplace of the Messiah from them), lead us to conclude that they were probably non-Judeans, specifically Persian priests. John P. Meier rightly states that according to the narrative of the Gospel of Matthew, the Magi's "celestial revelation was only partial; they must finally submit to God's revelation in the Scriptures, preserved by the Jewish people" (Meier, 1980: 11).

Luz contends that the Gospel of Matthew offers some information about the identity of the Magi in the Magi's question about the birthplace of the "king of the Jews" (Matt. 2:2). Here, the implied author probably gave information indirectly to his ideal reader (Luz, 1989:112). In addition to v. 2, the word Ἰουδαῖος is found in the Gospel of Matthew four times (Matt. 27:11, 29, 37, and 28:15). While the first three occurrences of the word is uttered by non-Judeans, in the fourth the author used it in such a way that he "intentionally distances himself from them" (Luz, 1989:112). On the other hand, the Matthean author consistently put the phrase king of Judea (cf. Matt. 2:2; 27:11) on the lips of non-Judeans, and king of Israel (cf. Matt. 27:42) on the lips of the "chief priests and the scribes". Therefore, by intentionally associating the word Ἰουδαῖος with non-Judeans, the implied author of the gospel probably wanted to reveal the non-Judean identity of the Magi.

However, Sim contends that we cannot infer much from the implied author's association of the word Ἰουδαῖος with non-Judeans. Because we cannot be certain that the author made an intentional distinction between Judeans and non-Judeans based on the usage of certain phrases (i.e., king of the Jews, and king of Israel), Sim argues that "[i]n all cases in the passion narrative where Matthew uses 'the King of the Jews' and 'the King of Israel' he has simply followed his Marcan source" (Sim, 1999:988). Therefore, "it is quite impossible to determine now whether he followed Mark at these points with the clear intention of distinguishing between different Jewish and Gentile expressions" (Sim, 1999:988). However, this argument is not totally

convincing. For in the passion narrative where the above-mentioned phrase is used, the author did not simply follow the Marcan source. He also omitted certain words, such as the Marcan προσεκύνουν (paid homage). This Matthean omission can almost certainly be attributed to the implied author's intent.

Furthermore, Sim contends that in contemporary Jewish literature, such as *Antiquities* 14:34-6; 15:373; and 16:311, the Jews themselves “used the expression ‘king of the Jews’”; therefore, the expression by itself does not necessarily lead us to conclude that they were non-Judeans. Though it is true that in contemporary Jewish literature the expression did not have a distinctive usage, in the New Testament the expression was used by non-Judeans, which shows intentionality in the author's usage and designates the non-Judeans.

Davies and Allison also argue that the Magi in Matt. 2:1-12 must have been non-Judean because they did not seem well acquainted with the Jewish literary traditions regarding the birthplace of the king of the Jews (Davies and Allison, 2004; Brown, 2005). David Sim objects to this argument based on the fact that the *magus* mentioned in Acts 8:9-24 were seemingly not familiar with the Jewish traditions, therefore, we should not expect more from the Magi of Matthew. They were just experts in astronomic studies as well as dream interpretation (Sim, 1999:989). He strengthens his argument by noting the absence of a single reference to scripture in the most complete Jewish astronomical book, *Treatise of Shem*. However, if we assume that the Magi of Matt. 2:1-12 were Judean astronomers, magi who had an interest in the birth of the king of the Jews and followed his star, why should we not think they would have associated their astronomical interest with the Jewish messianic anticipation? According to the implied author's portrayal of the Magi, their interest in the birth of the king of the Jews probably emanated from their astronomical studies. However, I think if they were Jews, their interest in the king of the Jews would primarily have emanated from Jewish traditions and would then have been linked to their astronomical studies. Therefore, I argue their exclusive focus on the astronomical studies about the birth of the king of the Jews leads to the conviction that they were non-Judeans.

On the other hand, some Matthean scholars argue that the Magi were non-Judeans on the basis of the correspondence between the stories of Balaam (Num. 22-24) and the Magi (Matt. 2:1-12) (Brown, 2005: 117-119; Tisera, 1993:59-60). Tisera contends that, though the link between the Magi and Balaam in regards to their identity is tenuous, it is still possible to say

that “Balaam, he is a Gentile, dealing with an intuition; here, the magi are Gentiles who set out in search of the king to worship him” (Tisera, 1993:59-60). Davies and Allison also argue that, for the author of the Gospel of Matthew, the presence of the Magi was not just a witness to the fulfilment of the Old Testament promises; they “themselves fulfill OT promises, being ‘those from Sheba who will come’, who will bring to Jerusalem the wealth of nations, gold, and silver, as the glory of the Lord rises upon her” (Davies and Allison, 2004, 1:231, referring to Isa. 60:6).

However, Sim criticises Matthean scholars who attempt to find a correspondence between the “story of Balaam in Num. 22-24 and the Magi in Matt. 2:1-12” and who argue that the implied author “modelled the Magi on the [non-Judean character] of Balaam”, and therefore they are non-Judeans. This argument is that the non-Judean character Balaam prophesied the rising of the messianic character, and the non-Judean Magi were evidence of the fulfilment of this prophecy. However, Sim asserts that this argument is not justified (Sim, 1999:991), because first, while the star in the Balaam story (Num. 24:17) is a symbol for the coming king, the star in the Magi’s story is “a real star that points to and reveals the location of the new-born messianic king” (1999:991). However, Brown responds to this criticism saying, “such a shift of imagery is quite intelligible once the king has been born” (Brown, 2005: 196). But Sim is not convinced; he contends that “in both cases [Bar Kokhba and Jesus according to Revelation] the original symbolism was retained” (Sim, 1999:992). Though contemporary Jewish and Christian traditions did not necessitate reinterpretation of the star of Balaam after the arrival of their anticipated Messiah, this does not necessarily lead us to conclude that there is no link between Balaam and the Magi story. The phrase αὐτοῦ τὸν ἀστέρα (his star) probably related with the well accepted contemporary notion that “every person has his or her own star or he is thinking of the king’s star” (Luz, 2007:113).<sup>47</sup> If “his star” signifies or symbolises the messianic character, there is no change of image from the star which symbolises the anticipated king (Balaam’s star), to the star which leads the Magi to the birthplace of the anticipated king (Magi’s star). Rather, in the first case, the star symbolises the anticipated king, in the second it symbolises the arrival of the anticipated king. If the implied author of the Gospel of Matthew followed the pattern of contemporary thinking, every person has his own star; therefore, the rising of the Messiah’s star was a symbol of the birth of the Messiah, and the correspondence between Balaam and the Magi

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<sup>47</sup> Cf. *Midr. Ps.* 148:3 which mentions every righteous man has his own star.

is valid. Furthermore, as Gundry rightly points out, “[t]he objection that in Numbers the star is the Messiah, whereas in Matthew it is only the sign of his coming, misses the metaphorical nature of the OT expression and the representative function of the star in Matthew” (1967:129). Thus, Sim’s argument to refute the non-Judean identity of the Magi, has no basis.

However, Sim still asks, “[i]f scholars are to confirm that the star in Matthew’s story of the magi was the fulfillment of the star in the Balaam oracle, then they need to explain why the evangelist did not in this case cement the link by using a formula quotation” (Sim, 1999: 992). Robert H. Gundry developed an argument against such an objection; he contends that

[i]t would be mistaken to think that because Matthew fails to quote Num. 23:7, 24:17-29 explicitly he has little or no interest in them. Throughout the gospel, he subtly conforms phraseology to the OT. Since Jesus has already been introduced as David’s son, Matthew expects his readers to catch such allusions. (Gundry, 1994:27)

Furthermore, Davies and Allison argue that in Matthew 2 the author used formal quotations in association with references to geographical locations (i.e., Bethlehem, Egypt, Ramah, Nazareth). This may be the reason why the author did not use a formal quotation to solidify the correspondence between the story of Balaam and the Magi (Davies and Allison, 2004:235).

In addition to his objection to the non-Judean identity of the Magi by demonstrating the dissimilarity of the references to the star in Num. 22-24 and Matt. 2:1-12, and the lack of formal quotation in Matt. 2:1-12, Sim forwards an argument relating to the reception of Balaam in both Jewish and Christian traditions to argue against the non-Judean identity of the Magi. He contends that Balaam is portrayed as a negative character as early as the book of Numbers (cf. Num. 31:8). Even in the books of Deuteronomy and Joshua, Balaam is depicted as a person who was about to curse Israel but was prevented by God from doing so (cf. Deut. 23:4-5; Jos. 24:9-10; cf. Neh. 13:2). Mic. 6:5 blames Balaam for the Israelites’ sin at Shittim. Furthermore, Sim argues that, in the writings of Philo and Josephus, he is depicted as a negative character. For instance, he is portrayed as an example of vanity and foolishness (*On Cherubim* I, 32-4) and as a fortune-teller (*Confusion of Tongues* 159) (Sim, 1999: 994-995). Therefore, he concludes, the author of the Gospel of Matthew would not have been likely to relate the story of the Magi with the story of Balaam. Consequently, the Magi in the Gospel of Matthew have no connection with



Balaam and the “argument for the Gentile status of the magi dissolves completely” (Sim, 1999: 996).

But why must the story of the Magi evoke all aspects of the Balaam story? Why not just one aspect of the story? That is, though Balaam was a foreigner, he prophesied about the coming of the king, and the Magi, who were also non-Judeans, witnessed the arrival of the anticipated king as the fulfilment of the prophecy. Therefore, if Matthew’s implied author intended to evoke this aspect of the story, there is no obstacle to seeing the correspondence between Balaam and the Magi as non-Judeans.

Furthermore, as Brown rightly points out, if the narrative of the Magi is outlined in the pattern of Balaam, “those outlines have been filled in from the Isaian description of the representatives of the nations who bring gold and frankincense to Jerusalem because the light and glory of the Lord has risen upon her” (2005:187). The allusion to Isa. 60:6 in Matt. 2:11 highlights the non-Judean character of the Magi (Brown, 2005: 187). Some Matthean scholars also argue that, in the Matthean narrative, the author, in addition to intentionally associating the phrase the king of the Jews with non-Judeans and indicating their origin as from “the East”, evokes the fulfilment of Isa. 60:6, which probably indicates the non-Judean identity of the Magi (Byrne, 2002:60-61).

### **6.3. The characterisation of the Magi**

In the Matthean narrative, the story about the coming of the Magi (2:1-12) is linked with the birth of Jesus, the new king of Judea (Τοῦ δὲ Ἰησοῦ γεννηθέντος ἐν Βηθλέεμ τῆς Ἰουδαίας), and its time is described as ἐν ἡμέραις Ἡρώδου τοῦ βασιλέως (2:1). The story tells from where they came (ἀπὸ ἀνατολῶν, Matt. 2:1). When compared to the next occurrence of the word ἐν τῇ ἀνατολῇ (Matt. 2:2), in the former the word is plural, the article is absent, and there is a different governing preposition, ἐν instead of ἀπό. While ἀπὸ ἀνατολῶν (Matt. 2:1) shows geographical direction, ἐν τῇ ἀνατολῇ (Matt. 2:2) denotes an astronomical location. Therefore, the meaning of ἐν τῇ ἀνατολῇ (Matt. 2:2) may be translated as “at its rising” or “when it rose”, which, as Brown and others have correctly noted, may allude to Num. 24:17, ἀνατελεῖ ἄστρον ἐξ Ἰακώβ (a star will rise from Jacob); a messianic reading of this was very popular in the 1<sup>st</sup> century (Brown, 2005: 195). Thus, the geographical direction which is stated by ἀπὸ ἀνατολῶν in Matt. 2:1 shows that the Magi were not part of the Judean community, they were outsiders. As we



will see later, this is further attested to by the phrase they used, βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων (king of Judeans).

As discussed in the previous section, magi was “originally the name of a Persian priestly caste, but later used widely for magicians and astrologers (cf. Acts 13:6), a numerous class in most countries in Western Asia at that time” (France 1985:81). Therefore, it is probable that the author depicted the Magi as people who came from the geographical east, had expertise in reading celestial characters, had learned of the birth of Israel’s long-awaited king through their expertise, and wanted to worship him (προσκυνέω, Matt. 2:2, 8, and 11). According to Louw and Nida (1988:218, 540), the word προσκυνέω can be used to mean either “to prostrate oneself before someone as an act of reverence, fear, or supplication” or “to prostrate oneself in worship, to bow down and worship, to worship”. In this context, the meaning of the word is probably the former because the coming of the Magi was related to the birth of the king of Judea.

On the other hand, King Herod, after hearing about the appearance of the Magi and the reason for their journey, plotted to misuse their dedication and kill the new-born king of Israel. However, the Magi learnt of King Herod’s wicked intention in their dreams, and, after presenting Jesus with their endowments, they went to their country by another way to prevent Herod from discovering the location of the newly born king of Israel (Matt. 2:3-8). Herod, maddened by their response, proceeded to slaughter the entirety of the infants in Bethlehem because he gathered information regarding the birthplace of the Messiah from “the chief priests and scribes of the people” (Matt. 2:4). However, Jesus and his family escaped to Egypt before the slaughter, because Joseph was warned by an angel (cf. Matt. 2:13).

This story of the Magi is a brief one (Matt. 2:1-12). The question is: How did the author depict the character of the Magi in this story? As Chatman states, “[a] character can be known by what the narrator says about him—including names, epithets, and descriptions or by what the narrator does in relation to him—including comparative or contrasting juxtapositions with other characters and the unfolding of the plot” (1978:29). According to the story, the Magi are characterised in three positive ways. The first one is through their actions. The Magi journeyed to Jerusalem after seeing “his star in the east”, meaning when it rose (Matt. 2:2), and searched for the new king of Israel. Having been directed to Bethlehem, they followed his star to the child before whom they bowed down (Matt. 2:9-11). They marked their exit from the narrative stage by obeying the divine guidance that was granted them (Matt. 2:12). This shows the implied

author depicted the Magi as characters who followed the glimpse of light given to them, as compared to the Jewish leaders, who knew the birthplace of their Messiah but did not show any sign of interest in inquiring about the truth of the incident.

Second, the author depicted the character of the Magi through their speech. They speak once and their speech is related to their journey, they “have come to worship Him” (Matt. 2:2). The character of the Magi is more vivid when we compare their response to the other characters’ responses in the narrative, such as King Herod, the people of Jerusalem, and the chief priests and elders of the people. Smillie rightly points out that the Magi are “set in stark relief by comparison with the attitude of the Jerusalem hierarchy, as portrayed in Matthew 2:3–8” (Smillie, 2002:85).

The final way in which the author characterises the Magi, is through analogy. In the Matthean narrative, the character of the Magi is drawn in comparison and contrast with King Herod (Matt. 2:3, 7-8, 12, 13-19), all Jerusalem (Matt. 2:3), and the entire group of chief priests and elders of the people (Matt. 2:4-6). As opposed to Herod and all Jerusalem (Matt. 2:3), the news of the birth of the Judean king brought unprecedented euphoria for the Magi (Matt. 2:10). Some Matthean scholars contend that the phrase “all Jerusalem” here refers to the people of Israel and the word ἐταράχθη (troubled, disturbed) shows their feeling about the event. The similarity of the responses of Herod and the people of Israel regarding the arrival of the new Judean king, indicates they were allies (Luz, 2007:113). This view is further supported by Viljoen, who points out the alliance of the people with the leaders in the passion narrative, and contends that the author, by comparing them with the Magi, was showing what was expected from the people of Israel (Viljoen, 2006b:255). However, Luz critiques this position, noting the unpopularity of King Herod with the Israelites by the time Jesus was born (Luz, 2007:113). Thus the majority of Matthean scholars argue that the phrase “all Jerusalem” represents just the leaders of Israel (cf. Horsley, 1989:52; Davies and Allison, 2004:23; Combrink, 1983:78). Luz, with Davies and Allison, contends that the author deliberately contrasted the non-Judean elite, the Magi, with the Judean elite (Luz, 1994:25; Davies and Allison, 2004:238).

Though the Magi were ignorant of the birthplace of the new king, in contrast to the Jewish leaders who theoretically knew the exact birthplace of the king but did nothing about it, the Magi went in search of the newly born king of Judea following the small light revealed to them (Matt. 2:11). As opposed to Herod, who desired to kill the new-born king, the Magi longed

to bow before the newly born king (Matt. 2:3, 11, cf. Matt. 2:7-8, 12-19). In contrast to King Herod and the Jewish leaders, they obeyed the God of Israel (Matt. 2:12, cf. Matt. 2:2, 10).

Therefore, regarding the implied author's depiction of the Magi in Matt. 2:1-12, we can certainly say that the Magi are characterised positively. But does this positive characterisation of the Magi hint, as most Matthean scholars claim, that their payment of homage to the newly born Judean king implied the inclusion of the non-Judeans into the Matthean community? I argue that their positive characterisation does not necessarily signify this. In the story the Magi are flat characters,<sup>48</sup> who lack complexity, development, and depth; therefore, not the type of characters with which the implied readers would associate themselves. The implied reader is rather called to evaluate their view of the main character, Jesus, the newly born Judean king, as compared to other minor characters in the narrative. Syreeni also contends that "[i]n order for a character to be perceived by a reader as a symbol... [it] has to reappear on several occasions" (2004:120). Furthermore, in non-fictional narratives, some characters have already developed a symbolic depth in the real world (e.g., Christ, Son of Man) and their narrative entity is secondary, thus their symbolic significations will not be affected by their type of character (flat or round) (Syreeni, 2004: 120). However, as seen in the Matthean narrative, the Magi do not fit into this category either. Therefore, the positive characterisation of the Magi alone does not necessarily indicate the symbolic signification of non-Judean inclusion. However, I do believe that it is still possible to show the symbolic significations of positive/negative narrative characters like the Magi through Barthes' semiological reading method. Scholars like Chatman have already established a basis for treating narrative in terms of a semiotic structure (Chatman, 1978: 22-26).

#### **6.4. The Magi as a symbolic representation of non-Judean characters and their role in forming the identity of the ideal readers**

Once the non-Judean identity of the Magi and their positive characterisation in the Matthean narrative is established, the next step is to look for the symbolic signification of the characters, the Magi, in the Matthean narrative. As noted above, many Matthean scholars suggest that the

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<sup>48</sup> "Flat characters were called 'humorous' in the seventeenth century, and are sometimes called types, and sometimes caricatures. In their purest form, they are constructed round a single idea or quality: when there is more than one factor in them, we get the beginning of the curve towards the round" (Forster, 1955: 67).

Magi in the Matthean narrative have a symbolic representational function: they represent the non-Judean inclusion and participation in the heavenly kingdom, which is established upon the arrival of the anticipated king, Jesus (Carter, 2004:273-274; Luz, 2007:1-8; Betz, 1995:272-273). The question is: What is the evidence for this representation? In other words, which theoretical framework led scholars to perceive the presence of the Magi in the Matthean infant narrative as representative of non-Judean inclusion, or as a sign for the pilgrimage of non-Judeans to participate in the benefits of eschatological fulfilment upon the coming of the long-awaited Messiah?

Carter contends that the author hints at the symbolic signification of the Magi through the gifts they brought:

The magi bring gifts and commit the political act of *proskynesis* or prostration, not before Herod, but before the child (Matt. 2:11). The narrative attributes representational significance to their gift-giving. The specific identification of the gifts evokes traditions of non-Judeans journeying to Jerusalem with gifts of gold (χρυσόν) and frankincense (λίβανον; cf. Isa. 60:6 for the same language). This worship comprises one act in Isaiah's much larger vision of the restoration of God's purposes and justice on earth, which compliant Gentiles recognize with worship and offerings in the temple (Isa. 60; 2:1-4; so also Ps. 72:10-11). By associating the magi with these traditions, Matthew's narrative frames the magi not just as individual non-Judeans who perceive what the Jerusalem elite does not, but also as characters that represent non-Judeans who participate in God's eschatological purposes, anticipating the day in which many non-Judeans will participate in the establishment of God's purposes. (Carter, 2004:273-274)

It is true that the association of the Magi with the "specific identification of the gifts" may evoke the traditions of non-Judean pilgrimage to participate in the eschatological blessings, and as they were non-Judean, it may justify their action. However, how the actions of the Magi in the narrative world symbolically represent non-Judean inclusion in the contextual world, as Carter contends, is not clear merely from the gifts alone. The presence of a character in the narrative does not necessarily have a symbolic representative function. Therefore, the relationship between the character in the narrative world and the people group represented by

the character in the contextual world, needs to be explicated by some sort of theoretical framework.

It is possible to address the issue of symbolic representation of the character through narrative criticism because, according to narrative criticism, for a character to have symbolic signification, it has to be complex and appear many times in the narrative (Syreeni, 2004: 120). However, not all characters in the gospels, such as the Magi, are complex and appear throughout the narrative. This leads us to conclude either that they do not have symbolic signification or that we need to find another method of reading the narrative that solves the problem.

To solve the puzzle, I have chosen to follow the latter path. As argued in Chapter Three, according to Barthes' semiological reading method, for a character to have symbolic signification, it does not necessarily have to be complex and appear throughout the narrative. Anything could be a myth, meaning that it can have symbolic signification. Therefore, using this theoretical framework as a heuristic reading tool, I will argue that it is possible to solve the above-mentioned dilemma and show how characters in the narrative, such as the Magi, can represent some group beyond themselves.

This study attempts to look for the symbolic signification of the character within the narrative world of the text, which is the author's interpretation of the contextual world. "[T]he narrative world is suggestive of a symbolic vision of reality that interprets both the narrative situation and the situations of Matthew's contemporary readers" (Syreeni, 2004: 117). Therefore, to reach a proper understanding of the appearance of the Magi in the Matthean narrative, we are obligated to study the 1<sup>st</sup>-century socio-cultural context in which the Gospel of Matthew was written, particularly the socio-cultural conditions in regard to the relationship between the Judeans and non-Judeans, as well as any cultural and theological background of a character mentioned in the narrative, if available. This is because "[T]he elements of Matthew's symbolic world must be assumed to have some inner coherence, and obviously, there are connections between Matthew's ideology and other early Jewish and Christian thought-worlds" (Syreeni, 2004: 116). Overall, the historical magi make a significant contribution towards the Magi's character portrayed in the Matthean narrative. Their impact and symbolic signification in the minds of Matthean narrative readers is communicated through the story in Matt. 2:1-12. Therefore, the implications of the pilgrimage of the Magi and the prophecy related to the coming Judean Messiah for the inclusion of non-Judeans, as well as the cultural and theological

background of characters mentioned in the narrative, all need to be studied to determine the symbolic signification of the Magi. According to the methodology used in this dissertation, this means searching for the second order meaning, the mythological meaning of the narrative.

### **6.5. Semiological reading of the Magi: Significance of the Magi in the Matthean infancy narrative**

As elucidated in the third chapter of this study, a better understanding of narratives such as the gospels requires grasping the links between the narrative world, the world to which the narrative is referring, and the contextual world with which the narrative world is associated, because the elements in such a narrative are not wholly fictitious. Therefore, for a proper understanding of Matthean characterisation, I have proposed four levels of analysis as an interpretative framework: the referential world (the actual world the story is referring to), the contextual world (the world of the author/redactor), the narrative world (the world of the text), and the ideological/symbolic world (the world the author intended or aimed to create). Though I will use the information gathered about the contextual world to understand the narrative world, the main focus of analysis will be the narrative world.

Narratives as a means of communication have an ideological role in the context in which they were produced. Narratives with the goal of communicating certain ideological points are often shaped by contextual issues, so to capture an ideological point that is communicated through the narrative, the contextual issues in the circumstances in which the narrative was produced, need to be studied. The author usually frames these contextual issues in the narrative through the process of reshaping the actual story, which occurred in the referential world. Thus, all these worlds contribute to understanding the ideology the author was attempting to communicate through the narrative.

Though it may be possible to grasp the ideological role of the text through various reading methodologies, I contend that Barthes' semiological reading method is a better hermeneutical tool to understand the ideological role of the narrative. Barthes defines myth as "a type of speech" (Barthes, 1972:117), which is a means of communication, and, according to Barthes, a means through which a culture connotes meaning and significations through forms. These forms derive their meaning from the socio-historical circumstances in which they are situated (Barthes, 1972:107-108; cf. McCutcheon, 2000:200). Therefore, Barthes contends that

“everything can be a myth provided it is conveyed by a discourse” (Barthes, 1972:107). It is often used by a society as an instrument through which they shape their surrounding world as well as their identity, thus it is an ideological weapon (McCutcheon, 2000:200; Lincoln, 1999:xii; Csapo, 2005:9). Following this definition of myth and theoretical framework, I will now illustrate how the implied author of the Gospel of Matthew used the non-Judean characters in the narrative, specifically the Magi, as myth, as a type of social argumentation to form the identity of the ideal readers.

### **6.5.1. Cultural and theological background of the Magi**

The above section dealing with the characterisation of the Magi discussed how the implied author characterised the Magi. However, this is the only information the implied author chose to narrate about the actions of the Magi. In fictional narratives, the reader has to be satisfied by the information the implied author chose to provide, and “it is natural for the readers to ask questions that do not transcend the limits of the story” (Merenlahti and Hakola, 1999:39). However, as Merenlahti and Hakola argue, “[i]n non-fictional narratives, the readers do not construct the meaning of the work solely based on the work itself; instead, they take into account all they know about the relationship of the work to the ‘real world’” (Merenlahti and Hakola, 1999:39-40). Therefore, to understand the way the implied reader reads the narrative, the reader of the non-fictional narrative should not depend solely on the information provided by the implied author; it is assumed that the implied reader shares implicit information regarding the characters mentioned in the narrative (Merenlahti and Hakola, 1999:40).

What then do we know about the identity of the Magi and their beliefs in relation to their positively characterised actions portrayed in the Matthean narrative? The story in Matt. 2:1 indicates the geographical location of the Magi with the words ἀπὸ ἀνατολῶν. The supposed location is disputed among Matthean scholars: while the historical origin of the Magi argues for Persia as their home country (Marsh-Edwards, 1956:3; Bacon, 1930:23), others prefer Babylon (Chaldea) on the basis of the astrological orientation of the Magi in the Matthean narrative. Still others contend that the Magi’s gifts (gold, frankincense, and myrrh) probably indicate they were linked with Arab traders (Brown, 2005:168-170). As G. Dellings (1976:356-359) rightly points out, the word μάγοι had four general meanings throughout the ages: “member of the Persian priestly caste”, “the possessor and user of supernatural knowledge and ability”; “magician”; and figuratively, “deceiver, seducer”. From the listed range of meanings of the word μάγοι, most



scholars recognise that “member of the Persian priestly caste” fits well with the context of Matthew (cf. Hagner, 1994:27), because in the stories of the ancient Persian kings we find more or less similar narrative structural features as in Matt. 2:1-12. As the birth of the new Judean king was announced by the Magi, according to Herodotus, the birth of a future king was conveyed by magi; as the birth of the Judean king later resulted in a massacre of infants in Bethlehem by King Herod who was attempting to eliminate the newly born Judean king, who escaped death, the Persian king, King Astyages (who ruled 585-550 B.C.E.) gave an order for his granddaughter’s newly born son to be seized and killed, because he had a dream which was later interpreted by magi as showing that this boy (King Cyrus) would overtake his throne, but he also miraculously escaped death (Liwa, 2019:106-107). Furthermore, though Babylonians (Chaldeans) are considered by modern historians as the true first practitioners of astronomical science, according to Herodotus, the Persian magi were linked with interpreting heavenly bodies (Litwa, 2019:109). Therefore, the above-mentioned narrative features show that the Matthean Magi can be associated with some sort of Persian magi. Liwa contends that “if he [the author] knew that the Persians prophesied a coming savior born of a virgin, it was appropriate to introduce Persian priests (the Magi) to confirm that a Saošyant character had indeed come—in the person of Jesus” (Litwa, 2019:105). Even though Brown says, “there is no evidence that Christians in Matthew’s time knew of this expectation” (Brown, 2005:169), these similarities in the narrative features are sufficient to suspect that the author had some knowledge of Persian prophecy.

Hagner also contends that “[i]n the NT the word refers to possessors of secret wisdom, and in our passage, it probably connotes astrologers, that is, men who gained special insight into world affairs from their observation of the planets and stars” (Hagner, 1994:26). If the μάγοι of the Matthean narrative belonged to the Persian priestly caste, what was their belief system? Answers to this question may cast light on the actions of the μάγοι in the Matthean narrative. According to historians, the Persian priestly families “may have believed in a mythical savior to come, called the Saošyant”, who is “a wonderful being, a king of righteousness destined to benefit the entire world” (Litwa, 2019:105). His coming was viewed as the inauguration of the age of restoration, the beginning of things to come in which justice and peace would reign, and it was believed he would be born of a virgin (cf. Isa.7:14).



### 6.5.2. The coming of the Judean king and its implications for non-Judean pilgrimage

Matthean scholars have long recognised echoes of Ps. 71 and Isa. 60 in Matt. 2:1-12 (Allen, 1907:13; Brown, 2005: 187; Gundry, 1967:129; Davies and Allison, 2004:250). One of the passages which is related to the pilgrimage of the non-Judean characters, is Isa. 60:6 LXX, alluded to in Matt. 2:11c. The allusion is seen in the two gifts, i.e., gold (φέροντες χρυσίον καὶ λίβανον οἷσουσιν; Isa. 60:6 LXX) and frankincense (χρυσὸν καὶ λίβανον καὶ σμύρναν; Matt. 2:11). Furthermore, as Tisera points out, the relationship between the two passages can also be deduced from

the prophetic character of the words of Isaiah and their fulfillment in the Magi. The nation will come (v. 3) to praise Yahweh (v. 6) in Jerusalem as the gentile magi came to Jerusalem (Matt 2:1b) and worshipped the child (Matt 2:11). (Tisera, 1993:60)

Similarly, Byrne contends that the parallelism between the two passages evokes the fulfilment of Isa. 60:6 in Matt. 2:11 (Byrne, 2002:60-61). Carter furthers this argument for the link between the traditions of Isa. 60:6 with the Magi, and contends that in the narrative of Matthew, the Magi are not just portrayed as an individual non-Judean character, “but also as characters that represent Gentiles who participate in God’s eschatological purposes, anticipating the day in which many Gentiles will participate in the establishment of God’s purposes” (Carter, 2004a). Brown’s argument about Isaiah’s description of these kings coming from mentioned nations as a representative of all nations, will probably lead us to similar conclusions—seeing the Magi as representative characters of non-Judeans (Brown, 2005:187).

But how do we know that the kings mentioned in Isa. 60:6 are representative of nations, and that the Magi are representative of non-Judean characters? This is the question which this research explicates in the next section of this chapter (see 6.6). I hope that the methodology used in this study will help establish how the link between individual characters like the Magi can have representational value.

The other text echoed in Matt. 2:11, is Ps. 71:10-11. The parallelism between the two passages is easy to see in the fact that, as the nations will pay homage to a king (Ps. 71:10-11), in

the narratives of Matthew the Magi are portrayed as coming to pay homage to the newly arrived Judean king (Matt. 2:11). The word similarity between the two texts is further evidence of the parallelism between the two accounts, such as δῶρα (Ps. 71:10 LXX; cf. Matt. 2:11) and προσοίσουσιν (Ps. 71:11 LXX; cf. προσεκύνησαν αὐτῷ, Matt. 2:11) (Gundry, 1967: 129).

However, while Ps. 71:11 LXX refers to πάντες οἱ βασιλεῖς πάντα τὰ ἔθνη (many kings of many nations), Matt. 2:1b says μάγοι ἀπὸ ἀνατολῶν (magi from the east). Guido Tisera contends that the difference between the two accounts is clear in that the first points to future events and the latter describes the realisation thereof and portrays Jesus as a king. “If the Psalm has all kings and all Nations (v. 10), Matt instead has the vague μάγοι ἀπὸ ἀνατολῶν (v. 1b) open to a symbolic representation” (Tisera, 1993: 60). He further argues that the Magi’s

thematic words (v.2) introduced by the present λέγοντες· put them beyond mere historical character. They are more than characters for their own sake. In virtue of their position on par with Herod and all Jerusalem and those Jewish leaders, the evocative nature of their words and actions, the OT allusion, they are representative of Gentiles. (Tisera, 1993:61)

Though Tisera’s assertion about the Magi as symbolic representatives is probably right, the vagueness of μάγοι ἀπὸ ἀνατολῶν (v. 1b) and their parallelism with Herod, Jerusalem, and Jewish leaders do not necessarily lead us to accept them as representative non-Judeans. His conclusion lacks a theoretical framework, which may have helped him to support his argument. In the next section (see 6.5.3), I will show how the reading methodology described in Chapter Three, socio-narrative reading, will help fill the gap in Tisera’s argument about the Magi as symbolic representation.

### **6.5.3. A semiological analysis of Matt. 2:1-12**

According to Barthes’ semiological reading, a sign is a product of a society; therefore, it should be studied by merging semiology and cultural sociology as a heuristic interpretative tool (Elliott, 2014:87). This sign is a summation of the signifier and the signified (Barthes, 1972) in which the relationship between the signifier and the signified is determined by the convention of the society (Elliott, 2014:90). Chapter Three described Barthes’ two semiological orders of reading signs. In the first order reading of a sign, its meaning is determined by the socio-historical

convention in which the sign is positioned. However, in the second order, which in Barthes' terminology is a myth, the meaning is determined by the socio-cultural context in which the sign is read.

Therefore, to discover the symbolic significations of the positively characterised Magi, we read the story of the Magi in the light of Barthes' semiological theoretical order. First, we read the story in its narrative world, and then we analyse the story in the socio-cultural context in which it was written and read. The former will be the first semiological order and the latter the second semiological order in terms of Barthes' theoretical framework.

In the narrative of the Magi (their coming, the star, etc.) they are many signifiers that signify the identity of the newly born baby, the king of the Judeans. In the first semiological order, the story clearly signifies the birth of Jesus, the Judean king. While he is received by the non-Judean Magi joyfully, the news is received by King Herod with fear and by the Judean religious leaders with disinterest. Thus:

*First order meaning: signifier* (the story about the coming of the Magi) + *signified* (Jesus is the saviour-king) = *the sign* (the story of the coming of the Magi testifies that the newly born baby Jesus is the saviour-king of the whole world).

As stated in Chapter Three, according to Barthes' semiological reading, the sign of the first semiological order is emptied of its meaning to become an empty form in the second order, and this empty form (the coming of the Magi) is filled with the meaning acquired from its contemporary situation (Barthes, 1972). Thus:

*Second order meaning: signifier* (the story of the coming of the Magi testifies that the newly born baby Jesus is the saviour-king of the whole world) + *signified* (non-Judean inclusion into the benefits the saviour-king has brought) = *the sign* (the coming of the Magi to worship the newly born Judean king, who is the saviour-king of the whole world, signifies that his salvific vocation is not confined to Judeans; non-Judeans also benefit from his coming; therefore, the coming of the Magi signifies the inclusion of non-Judeans).

In the second semiological order of the Magi's story, its symbolic signification is related to the inclusion of non-Judeans. Scholars accept that the issue of non-Judean inclusion was one

of the important issues in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. In the historical context in which the inclusion of non-Judeans was disputed, it seems that this story was used by the author to legitimise the inclusion of non-Judeans in his community. This socio-narrative reading explicates the symbolic representational role of the Matthean Magi which is often overlooked in scholars' presentation of the Magi. It also illustrates how their presence in the narrative may be interpreted as one element of the implied author's attempts to construct the identity of the community.

#### **6.6. The role of the symbolic representation of the Magi in forming the identity of the ideal readers**

As argued in Chapter Four, the Matthean author used stereotyped non-Judean others to construct the identity of the ideal readers' community; the identity of the community was constructed against the outsider others, who were non-Judeans. However, the implied author of the Gospel of Matthew did not characterise the non-Judeans solely in a stereotypical others manner; the positive characterisation of non-Judeans is also employed in the narrative. So, the question is: What is the role of the positively characterised non-Judeans, such as the Magi, in forming the identity of the ideal readers' community?

Though the followers of Christ in the 1<sup>st</sup> century had recently detached themselves from Judaism, they were still engaged with issues concerning Judaism. Who were the authentic members of God's people? Could non-Judeans be a part of this community? These are some of the questions the author of the Gospel of Matthew attempted to answer. One of the ways he did this, is through the story of the Magi's visit to the newly born Judean saviour-king. As discussed the positively characterised non-Judean Magi symbolically signify the inclusion of non-Judeans in the ideal community. The next question is: What is the impact of the inclusion of non-Judeans into the ideal community on reconfiguring or redefining the identity of this community?

An answer to the question is related to the question of the membership of this community: Who are God's people? In the section which discussed the signification of the four non-Judeans in the Matthean genealogy, the study briefly dealt with the issue of the people of God in the Old Testament and in intertestamental literature. It is clear that the people of God are (mainly) those who are ethnic Judeans, related by blood. Therefore, if non-Judeans wished to be a part of this community, they had to pass through certain proselytisation rites. However, it seems that the author of the Gospel of Matthew did not recommend this rite as a means through

which non-Judeans could be part of the community (contrary to Sim). Furthermore, he wanted to redefine the identity of the community and reconstitute its composition in terms of allegiance to the saviour-king, rather than in terms of blood relationship.

There is growing consensus among scholars that the Matthean Jesus was a prophet, who is linked with the eschatological restoration of Israel (Sanders, 1985:91-119; Borg, 2006:127; Wright, 1997:209; Fredriksen, 2000:236-241; McKnight, 1999:9-14; Freyne, 2004:109-121). The calling of the twelve disciples, as well as the limitation of the mission given to the disciples (Matt 10.5b-6; 15:24) (cf. Meier, 2001:544; Sanders, 1985:220; LaGrand, 1999) in the Matthean narrative may show that Jesus' followers were portrayed as forerunners of the restored Israel which Jesus was reconstituting around himself. Furthermore, the number twelve is related to the restoration of Israel in 1QS 8:1 and the reconstitution of the twelve Jewish tribes in Josephus's writing (*Ant.* 11.107).

Therefore, we could say that the author of the gospel was engaging with an identity formation project by writing stories about a man called Jesus, a biography of Jesus. This story was reshaped and framed to address the contemporary issues with which the author was concerned. Therefore, the reshaping and framing of the story is a mythmaking process. As noted in Chapter Three, a society, in line with its social interest (Mack, 1996: 11), is always involved in the project of reconstructing or reframing its identity through mythmaking (McCutcheon, 2000:202). Therefore, through the mythmaking process, a society maintains "paradoxes, fighting over dissonances, and surviving breakdowns" (Lease, 2009:133). Likewise, the author of the Gospel of Matthew used the narrative, in our case, the story of the Magi, to reconstitute the identity of his ideal readers' community, which had recently distinguished its identity from that of its Jewish contemporaries. McCutcheon states that identity formation through mythmaking is "an activity of experimenting with, authorizing or combating, and reconstructing widely circulated ideal type, idealization or, better put, mystification that function to control the means of and sites where social significations are selected, symbolized and communicated" (2000:203). This endeavour of society through mythmaking is an ideological activity (Lincoln, 1986:164) in which the group pursues social scheming and legitimisation (Arnal and Braun, 2004:462). Therefore, this task of identity formation through mythmaking is an ideological strategy (McCutcheon, 2000:204). Thus, the symbolic signification of the story of the Magi is

an ideological strategy employed by the Matthean implied author to form the identity of the ideal reader's community.

The ideological strategy is implemented by the author in a situation where the genuine identity of the community is contested. The Magi are not considered authentic people of God by Judeans. The cause of the contestation is probably related to the acceptance of non-Judeans into their community, and therefore, the author wanted to legitimise this action. As McCutcheon shows, when a society has faced social disturbances, logical inconsistencies, and incoherencies, they are often engaged in the project of identity formation through mythmaking (McCutcheon, 2000: 204). Mack also argues that the identity of a society is formed through a constant mythmaking process (Mack, 2006). The author of the Gospel of Matthew redefined the identity and the composition of the community in terms of allegiance to the saviour-king instead of blood relationship. This redefinition of identity was accomplished by writing stories about a man called Jesus, a biography of Jesus. Though it was based on the story of Jesus, it was reshaped and framed to address the contemporary issues which the author wanted to address. Therefore, the reshaping and framing of the story is a mythmaking process through which the author was forming the identity of the community.

Though Gundry suggests that the story of the Magi is a reworking of the story of the shepherds in Luke (Gundry 1994:26-32) based on the similarities between the two stories, these similarities are not sufficient to say that one is the reworking of the other. Furthermore, though many Matthean scholars identify several characteristics of the Matthean narrative in the story of the Magi, which tempts them to accept the story as the author's innovation, they generally concede the presence of traditions behind the story (Derrett, 1975:108; Nolland, 1998:283-300; Davies and Allison, 2004:190-195). Therefore, the author of the Gospel of Matthew probably chose from the available traditions and reshaped the story of the Magi to address the debate on the inclusion of non-Judeans in the 1<sup>st</sup>-century context. I have argued that, though the story of the Magi in the Matthean narrative aimed primarily at affirming the identity of the newly born Judean saviour-king, Jesus, the positive characterisation of the Magi in the context in which non-Judeans were perceived negatively, leads us to look for additional meaning—an ideological meaning—which the author wanted to communicate to the reader. This meaning is related to the symbolic signification of the Magi: the inclusion of non-Judeans into the community. Their

inclusion assumes the reconstitution and redefinition of God's people, and a reconfiguration of the perception of non-Judeans.

## **6.7. Conclusion**

Using Barthes' semiological reading method as a heuristic tool, I was in this chapter able to show the symbolic representational role of the Magi. If the positively characterised Magi symbolically represent the inclusion of non-Judeans into the reconstituted people of God, it legitimises the inclusion of non-Judeans into the ideal readers' community. This inclusion of non-Judeans adds a new feature to the ideal readers' community, which defines its identity in a new manner using Judean traditions, in the context in which conversion through proselytisation had been mandatory for inclusion into the Judean community. The implied author, by using the Magi as a symbolic representation of the inclusion of non-Judeans, legitimised the inclusion of non-Judeans into the newly reconstituted people of God. The inclusion of non-Judeans into the reconstituted people of God to be beneficiaries of the blessings that the Messiah brought, shows that the identity of the ideal readers' community is redefined. Therefore, I argue that the story of the Magi was used by the implied author to reshape the identity of the ideal readers' community.

The story of the Magi in the gospel was formed within the framework of Judean traditions that anticipated the inclusion of non-Judeans in the messianic blessings upon the arrival of the Messiah, and also in line with the non-Judean anticipation of the redeemer. I have argued that the story, which is told within these frameworks, symbolically signifies the legitimisation of the inclusion of non-Judeans in the ideal readers' community. Though in its first semiological order the story signifies the birth of Jesus, the Judean king, in the second semiological order its symbolic signification is the inclusion of non-Judeans, because his kingship is for the whole world. This signifies his salvific vocation is not confined to Judeans, but non-Judeans also benefit from his coming. Therefore, the coming of the Magi signifies the inclusion of non-Judeans to be the recipients of the blessings the king has brought. Because the story implies a change in the composition of the recipients of the messianic blessings, it has an identity-forming role, it reshapes the constitution of the recipients of the messianic blessings. Thus, it redefines the identity of the people of God, who are ultimately the recipients of the messianic blessings.

In the next chapter, I will focus on showing how the implied author used the story of the healing of the centurion's servant (Matt. 8:5-13) to form the identity of the ideal readers' community.



## Chapter Seven

### 7. The healing of the centurion's servant: A case of identity formation of an ideal readers' community

#### 7.1. Introduction

The previous two chapters attempted to show how the implied author used non-Judean characters, such as the four non-Judeans in the genealogy account and the Magi in the Matthean narratives, to form the identity of the ideal readers' community. Similarly, this chapter will address how the implied author employed the story of the pleading of the centurion for the healing of his servant to form the identity of the ideal readers' community.

In the Matthean narrative, the story of the pleading of the centurion for the healing of his servant (Matt. 8:5-13) comes after the Sermon on the Mount. The event took place in the city of Capernaum. The identity of this centurion is not much contested among scholars, except by David Sim, who argues for his Judean identity. He contends that considering the centurion as non-Judean means Jesus ministered to a non-Judean, which is “an aberration in the context of Jesus' mission” (Sim, 1998: 224). Even though we are not told explicitly what the ethnic identity of the centurion in the story was, the usage of a common word for a Roman centurion, a commander of a hundred soldiers, *ἐκατόνταρχος*, implies that he was a Roman soldier, thus, a non-Judean (cf. Bird, 2006:118-119).

In Chapter Four I argued that in the Sermon on the Mount and in the whole gospel, the implied author depicted non-Judeans through Jesus' teaching in a stereotypical others manner—as outsiders who are ignorant of God and consequently exhibit a lifestyle that shows their ignorance. However, this stereotypical depiction does not seem fit with the story of the Roman centurion in Matt. 8:5-13. Furthermore, Matthean scholars have long recognised the symbolic significance of this episode, which is related to the demonstration of Jesus' authority (cf. Matt. 7:28-29) as well as the inclusion of non-Judeans into God's kingdom. With regard to the latter, from the narrative point of view it is possible to see Jesus' teaching (Matt. 8:10-12) as referring to the inclusion of non-Judeans. But it is not evident how the positively characterised centurion symbolically signifies the inclusion of non-Judeans into the reconstituted people of God (cf. Allison, 2004:19), because the centurion, as a character in the narrative, lacks complexity and

repetitiveness, which are the criteria for symbolic signification, according to Syreeni (2004:120). Therefore, the ideological role of the positively characterised Roman centurion in Matt. 8:5-13 needs to be explicated using another reading model. In this section, I aim to elucidate the symbolic signification of the Roman centurion using the socio-narrative reading method as a heuristic interpretive tool. Using Barthes' semiological reading method as interpretive tool I will argue that the story of the healing of the centurion servant on its second level semiological order shows that the healing authority of Jesus, that is manifested through the healing of the centurion's servant, symbolically signifies the inclusion of non-Judeans as the recipients of the messianic blessings. Thus, if the centurion servant received the messianic blessings, the story has symbolic signification which I will show using Barthes' semiological reading method as heuristic tool. Furthermore, I will argue that the symbolic signification of the story will redefine the identity of the recipient of the messianic blessing.

## **7.2. Matthean characterisation of the Roman centurion**

The location in which the story about the Roman centurion takes place is very relevant for understanding the way he is characterised in the story. Jesus is coming down from the mountain (Matt. 8:1), where he presented a substantial amount of teaching, in which he referred to stereotypical non-Judean others (cf. Matt. 6:7, 32). The non-Judeans were depicted as ignorant of God and their ignorance was reflected in their lifestyle and devotion (see Chapter Four). This description is related to their being considered as outsiders, others. However, as we shall see, the Roman centurion is portrayed as a person not exhibiting characteristics by which Jesus stereotypically categorised the non-Judeans as other in his teaching—who are ignorant of God and exhibit lifestyles that display their ignorance (see Matt. 6:7; 6:32; 18:17; and 20:19).

The first characteristic that the Roman centurion exhibits against the non-Judean stereotype is registered in Matt. 8:6, where he presents his appeal on the behalf of his servant. As argued in Chapter Four, one of the characteristics the Matthean Jesus used to stereotype non-Judeans as others was their way of exercising authority: they “lord it over them... exercise authority over them” (Matt. 20:25). However, the centurion in Matt. 8:5-13, rather than acting as a lord over his servant, is serving him, pleading on his behalf. Slaves in the Greco-Roman world belonged to the lower class of society (Vledder, 1997:180). Therefore, the pleading action of the centurion on behalf of his servant was typical of what Jesus was urging “them”, the ideal readers, to uphold (cf. Matt. 23:25-28).

Culpepper notes also the humility of the centurion:

The centurion demonstrates compassion and mercy, seeking help for his servant, and has faith that Jesus can heal him. He also demonstrates humility: he is not worthy to have Jesus come to his home—a quality Matthew's readers might have found surprising in a Roman officer. (Culpepper, 2016: 20)

Furthermore, the centurion, himself a non-Judean, is considered unclean by Judean society and is marginalised by Judeans, and his association with a sick person makes him even more marginalised (Vledder, 1997:180). However, the implied author depicted the centurion, even though he is marginalised and his actions may make him more marginalised, as pleading on behalf of his servant, in such a way that he is characterised positively as a character worth pursuing.

The other characteristic of the centurion that astonished the Matthean Jesus, was his recognition of God's authority. As noted in Chapter Four, one of the characteristics Jesus used to stereotype non-Judeans as others, was their deficiency in acknowledging the authority of the God of Israel. However, as a soldier with experience, the centurion knew how authority in the military realm worked. As the Roman emperor had given authority to the centurion over the other people in his territory, God had bestowed authority to Jesus over illness (Harrington, 1991:114; Hare, 1993: 91). The authority which was given to Jesus over illness, was a manifestation of his messianic identity. The centurion here seems to acknowledge the God of Israel who is working through Jesus, which leads Jesus to say, "Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found with such faith" (Matt. 8:10). This statement about the centurion is contrary to the stereotypical labelling of non-Judeans by the Matthean Jesus.

Furthermore, the analogy the centurion used to explain how authority worked, is not only related to his acknowledgment of the authority of God of Israel; it also shows his recognition of the societal boundary between Judeans and non-Judeans. The centurion's reply was made in the context of Jesus' statement, ἐγὼ ἐλθὼν θεραπεύσω αὐτόν (Matt. 8:7). In Greek this statement is ambiguous and leads commentators to translate Jesus' response in different ways. While some translate it as a statement (see Blomberg, 1992:141; Hill, 1972:158; Hagner, 1994:204), others translate it as a question (see Levine, 1988:111; Nolland, 2005:355; France, 2007:313). Though this sentence could be translated as "I will come and cure him" (NRSV), as

Evans rightly points out, the “centurion’s response in vv. 8–9 suggests that Jesus’ reply be understood as a question” (Evans, 2012:187). This is further attested to by Jesus’ reluctance to extend his messianic blessing of healing to the Canaanite woman, and on the restriction of his disciples’ mission to only among the Judeans (Evans, 2012:187). Therefore, I argue that it makes more sense when it is translated in a question form, “Am I to come and cure him?”

Talbert states the sociological reason why Jesus is reluctant to go with the centurion:

This takes place in Capernaum, a Jewish territory where Jews were not supposed to enter a gentile’s dwellings because they were unclean. Herod Antipas, like his father, primarily used non-Jewish soldiers (Josephus, *Ant.* 17.198; 18.113–14). Jews considered contact with gentiles contaminating (Acts 10:28; Josephus, *J.W.* 2.150; *m. Ohol.* 18.7). Therefore, the translation of the sentence is more of “Am I to come and cure him?” (Talbert, 2010: 113)

Thus, the centurion firstly uses an analogy in reply to Jesus’ question, which indirectly implies the societal boundary between Judeans and non-Judeans, ἐγὼ ἐλθὼν θεραπεύσω αὐτόν (Matt. 8:7). In his reply to Jesus’ question, the centurion shows his respect for this boundary (Matt. 8:8). Senior points out that the centurion “expresses profound respect for Jesus as a Jew and does not insist that Jesus come under his roof” (Senior, 1999:20; see also France, 2007:313).

Second, he uses the analogy of how authority works, which shows that he understands the messianic role of Jesus, as the one who is authorised (by God) to establish the kingdom of heaven, its manifestation being the healings he performed which are recorded in Matt. 8-9. The centurion, in the way he explains how authority works, expresses his knowledge of the societal gap between Judeans and non-Judeans, but suggests that just speaking the authoritative word will demolish the societal gap that prevents the centurion’s servant from being healed (μόνον εἰπὲ λόγῳ, καὶ ἰαθήσεται ὁ παῖς μου; “only say the word, and my servant will be healed”, Matt. 8:8). These words of the centurion amaze Jesus (ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐθαύμασεν, Matt. 8:10), and then he states, παρ’ οὐδενὶ τοσαύτην πίστιν ἐν τῷ Ἰσραὴλ εὔρον (Matt. 8:10). Here the action that astonishes Jesus is expressed as πίστιν. Davies and Allison argue that:

In the First Gospel, πίστις and πιστεύω are used, roughly, in three ways. There is first the secular sense, intellectual assent (24:23, 26). This is of no theological

significance. Secondly, ‘faith’ is, as in Paul, a comprehensive term meaning acceptance of, loyalty to, and trust in Jesus and his message: it characterizes the essence of Christian existence (18:6; 21:25; 27:42; cf. 23:23). Thirdly, there is the use of ‘faith’ in the miracle stories. This is a belief in Jesus and his power as a miracle worker. (Davies and Allison, 2004:25)

Other Matthean scholars regard the πίστις of the centurion that astonished Jesus as his trust in Jesus as the person appointed by God to establish heaven’s kingdom on earth. They argue that the implied author did not depict Jesus just as a healer, but rather as the person appointed by God to establish a heavenly kingdom on earth, as the Judean Messiah, and one of the ways his messianic identity was manifested, was through his healing authority. This notion of the Matthean depiction of Jesus in the story of the centurion is well captured by Carson,

Jesus commended the man’s faith (cf. also v.13). The greatness of his faith did not rest in the mere fact that he believed Jesus could heal from a distance but in the degree to which he had penetrated the secret of Jesus’ authority. That faith was the more surprising since the centurion was a Gentile and lacked the heritage of OT revelation to help him understand Jesus. But this Gentile penetrated more deeply into the nature of Jesus’ person and authority than any Jew of his time. (Carson, 1984:202)

Therefore, the appeal of the centurion on behalf of his servant, his acknowledgment of the God of Israel, and his understanding of the messianic identity of Jesus, which was manifested through Jesus’ healing activity, show the implied author’s positive characterisation of the Roman centurion. However, this positive characterisation of the centurion is contrary to the stereotype labelling of non-Judeans by the Matthean Jesus in his teachings on the mountain. So, what is the role of this positive characterisation of the centurion?

As in the case of the Magi, Matthean scholars recognise the symbolic signification of the centurion, i.e., the inclusion of non-Judeans, though it is not clear how they arrived at such a conclusion. Most Matthean scholars link the symbolic signification with Jesus’ saying regarding the coming of the many to participate in the eschatological feast with the patriarchs (Talbert, 2010: 114). Though the link between the story of the centurion and Jesus’ saying may lead to such a conclusion, I argue that like other stories in the Gospel of Matthew in which non-

Judeans are mentioned (i.e., the four non-Judeans in the genealogy, the Magi and a Canaanite woman), the story of the centurion does not necessarily need a Jesus saying to signify the inclusion of non-Judeans.

Therefore, the following section will attempt, using Barthes' semiological reading model as a heuristic tool, to show how the story of the centurion symbolically represents the inclusion of non-Judeans into the ideal readers' community. Furthermore, it will consider how this symbolic representation was used by the implied author to form the identity of the ideal readers; in other words, the ideological role of the story of the centurion will be investigated.

### **7.3. The narrative placement of Matt. 8:5-13 and its implications**

Matthean scholars have followed different paths to find the intended meaning of the miracle stories in Matthew 8-9, specifically the story of the healing of the centurion's servant. Though all agree that the placement of the story contributes to determining the meaning of the story in its narrative world, they do not agree on how.

Some Matthean scholars approach the story using either source criticism (Held, 1963:242-245) or redaction criticism (Bornkamm, 1963:54-57; Thompson, 1971:365-388) to explain it from a thematic point of view (i.e., discipleship, prophecy, the fulfilment of the promise about the coming of God's servant/Christology, faith, and so on) from isolated fragments (Bornkamm, 1963a: 54-57). Using compositional techniques as his interpretive tool, Thompson treats Matt. 8:1-17 in the light of Christology and contends that "[i]n these miracle stories, Matthew focuses attention on the person of Jesus, his words and his actions" (Thompson, 1971:368). Though the compositional techniques he uses are helpful to trace the continuity of themes, they do not help to follow the storyline in Matthew 8-9, because this method hinders seeing the whole picture of the Gospel of Matthew as a narrative. Using the thematic approach to the story of the miracles in Matthew 8-9 as consecutive themes for the teaching of the church, makes it generally difficult to trace the authorial intention, which requires following the storyline from the whole gospel point of view.

Others study the stories of miracles in Matthew 8-9 by focusing on the meaning that can be deduced from the structure of the narrative. However, there is no unanimously agreed structure of the whole gospel in which the stories of these miracles are presented as a subcategory (Bauer,

1989:11; (Luz, 2007:35. 97; Gundry, 1982:10). Those who analyse the stories of the miracles in Matthew 8-9 from a narrative structural point of view, address this section from a geographical and chronological point of view (see Bauer, 1989:22-26). Those who study the structure from the geographical point of view, though they vary in their understanding of the structure of the Gospel of Matthew, use the Markan tradition in which Jesus travels from Galilee to Jerusalem as the norm for their narrative structure (Burton, 1898:37-39). The main problem of this method is that it is difficult to assess the whole theology of the Gospel of Matthew from the limited geographical movement perspective alone. Furthermore, this approach neglects the authorship of the Gospel of Matthew; it simply treats the author as a copyist with no role in fashioning and rearranging the tradition, which is contrary to what is proven by the redaction criticism method. Therefore, the geographical and chronological method are not helpful for investigating the intention of the author in placing the miracle stories in Matthew 8-9, particularly Matt. 8:5-13, where the story of the healing of the centurion's servant is recorded.

Others have developed a structure for the Gospel of Matthew from the perspective of narrative discourse. According to this approach, the whole narrative of the Gospel of Matthew could be structured around the two poles of narrative and discourse, as an introduction to Matthew 10 or as a follow-up to Matthew 5-7 (Bacon, 1930; Roland, 1972:155-176), but this approach cannot address the issue of the author's intent in choosing and placing the miracle stories in a specific part of the narrative or the issue of the meaning of the miracle stories.

To address the inadequacy of the narrative discourse approach in tracing the authorial intention, other Matthean scholars have attempted to clarify the structure of the gospel from a conceptual perspective, which sees the whole narrative mainly from the viewpoint of salvation history. This is presented in three stages: the promise to Israel, the earthly life of Jesus, and the beginning of the church, with minor variations (Trilling, 1969; Patte, 1987). For instance, for Trilling, the central theme of the Gospel of Matthew is that the "true Israel", the disciples of Jesus, is composed of all nations, with a "new Torah", who have a mandate of announcing the good news to the whole world (Trilling, 1969). The influence of this idea is seen in his interpretation of Matthew 5-10 in which he structures the section as "(1) the True Doctrine of the True Justice (5:1 – 7:29); (2) the Deeds of the Messiah (8:1 – 9:34) and the Teaching on Discipleship (9:35 – 11:1)" (Trilling, 1969:59-198). In the second part of this structure, he divides the miracle stories in Matthew 8-9 into three sections, but does not explain why.



However, according to his pattern of thinking, it could be said that those who were called to be a “true Israel” would do similar miracles as Jesus did, thus, the main point of the section (Matt. 5-10) is to portray Jesus as the New Moses who gives the New Torah to the New Israel. Trilling puts much emphasis on a few passages out of the whole gospel which are directly related to the Great Commission. Thus, one of the pitfalls of this method is that it attempts to examine narrative substructure such as Matthew 8-9 in the light of what is considered the overall narrative macrostructure. This jeopardises the investigation into what might have inspired the author, which is probably only to be found in that subcategory; therefore, the methodology fails to give appropriate emphasis to the whole narrative (Trilling, 1969).

Another Matthean scholar, Jack D. Kingsbury, using the same conceptual framework, i.e., salvation history, but with different structural marks (“from that time Jesus began...” as seen in 4:17 and 16:21), proposes a structure for the gospel and its intention (Kingsbury, 1989: 8). Contrary to his predecessors, who include advocates of redaction criticism such as Bacon, who emphasises changes or additions the redactor made to the tradition he received, Kingsbury, in his analysis focuses on the final composition of the gospel. Thus, Kingsbury understands Matthew 8-9 within the Christological oriented structure of the gospel. Therefore, he contends that the miracle stories are “ten mighty acts of deliverance” which demonstrate the healing activities of Jesus, the Son of God, who heals with the power bestowed upon him from God (Kingsbury, 1989: 8).

Similarly, John Meier uses salvation history as a paradigm to develop the structure of the Gospel of Matthew. He relies heavily on passages like Matt. 10:5-6; 15:24; and 28:16-20 and divides the Gospel of Matthew into two major sections: the earthly ministry of Jesus (chap. 1-25) and the passion, death, and resurrection (chap. 26-28) (Meier, 1977). Like Bacon, he uses the narrative-discourse pattern, structuring the gospel using the nexus of Christology and ecclesiology. He divides the first section of the book into five books: Book I (Matt. 1:1-7:27); Book II (Matt. 7:28-11:21); Book III (Matt. 11:1-13:53); Book IV (Matt. 13:53-19:1); and Book V (Matt. 19:1-25:46). He regards the first book as “the initial proclamation of the kingdom” and the second book as “the full bloom of the mission in Galilee”. He also contends that the relationship between Christology and ecclesiology is reflected in Matthew 3-4 and 5-7 respectively, and that likewise a similar nexus is seen between Matthew 8-9 and 10. Meier argues that the main theme of Matthew 8-9 is Christology and the use of the term Son of Man



for Jesus identifies him as an Isaianic servant character who is “a lowly servant among his people, associating with sinners, showing mercy to the outcast or mistreated” (Meier, 1979:69). He further strengthens this point by dividing Matthew 8-9 into “three trios of miracles with three intermediate buffers” (Meier, 1979:67), of which the first trio of stories (Matt. 8:1-17) contains three kinds of outcast and marginalised people whom Jesus, a lowly servant of Isaiah, the Son of Man who depicts himself as deprived of basic needs, healed. These are the leper, the Gentile soldier, and the woman who was Peter’s mother-in-law. These healing miracles show his mercy for the marginalised (Meier, 1977).

Another Matthean scholar, Bernard Combrink, developed a threefold structure for the Gospel of Matthew following modern literary theories. After rejecting the structures developed by redaction criticism, Combrink developed this three-phase structure of the Gospel of Matthew using literary criticism tools, mainly Van Dijk’s (1980:112-116) superstructure of narrative theory. Combrink contends that “the narrative plot of Matthew consists of the following three elements: (1) Setting (1:1 – 4:17); (2) Complication (4:18 – 25:46); (3) Resolution (26:1 – 28:20)” (Combrink, 1983: 75). It seems he modified Dan Via’s (1980:201-202) structure of the Gospel of Matthew, which is based on “(1) the initial situation and initial state, (2) a process of amelioration or degradation, (3) goal (final state) scheme to develop his symmetrical proposal for the composition of the Gospel of Matthew” (Combrink, 1983:74). Combrink sees the formula “from that time Jesus began to...” in 4:17 and 16:21 as a literary clue, and the five narrative-discourse repetitions as the basis for construction (Combrink, 1983:69-72). Taking into consideration the narrative structure developed by Combrink, the role of Matthew 8-9 in the narrative is to “constitute a substantial contribution to the characterization of Jesus and the narrative plot” (Combrink, 1983:81). Combrink shows how the author characterised Jesus in Matthew 8-9 using one of his main divisions, Matt. 4:23-9:35. He contends that it “is demarcated by the repetition of 4:23 in 9:35... Jesus’ teaching (chap. 5-7) and healing ministry (chap. 8-9)” that shows “Jesus’ ministering to Israel in word and deed” (Combrink, 1983: 80). Furthermore, he argues that “[c]hapters 5-7 underline Jesus’ ἐξουσία... The ἐξουσία of Jesus is again stressed (8:27; 9:7, 33)” (Combrink, 1983: 80).

The idea that the healings recorded in Matthew 8-9 are manifestations of the dawning of the kingdom through the work of Jesus is further attested to by their placement in Matthew’s structure. The placement of the healings after the Sermon on the Mount “illustrates Jesus’

teachings... and provides examples of the inbreaking of the kingdom through Jesus' works" (Culpepper, 2016: 2). Furthermore, Jesus himself, in his reply to the question of John the Baptist (Matt. 11:4-5), confirms that the healings are the demonstration of the kingdom through the work of the Messiah. Culpepper rightly points out that the people healed by Jesus in Matthew 8-9 are from different social groups: "a leper, a centurion's servant, a family member of his ingroup, a Gadarene, a 'ruler' (ἄρχων – 9:18) and an unclean woman. He also heals persons with various illnesses: leprosy, paralysis, fever, demons, hemorrhage, blindness, and muteness. He even restores a dead girl to life" (Culpepper, 2016:2).

If these healings by Jesus were manifestations of the inbreaking of the kingdom, they were experienced by Judeans but, because of the societal barrier, non-Judeans are not yet experiencing the fruits of this manifestation. The centurion suggests that his words μόνον εἰπὲ λόγῳ will solve the problem which prevents his servant from benefitting from this fruit. The question is, How? The answer to this question is probably found in the assumption that the words of the centurion evoke Ps. 107:20, "He sent forth his word and healed them." The healing in Psalms is related to the benefits of being a people of God, his covenantal people. However, the implied author ascribed these words to the centurion, who was suggesting that he might partake in the covenant blessings, the manifestations of the breaking-in of the kingdom. Therefore, Culpepper contends, "he is the first of many Gentiles who will eat with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven (8:11). The boundaries between Jew and Gentile will be overcome and the excluded will be included" (Culpepper, 2016:20).

This is further evidenced by Jesus' statement after being amazed by the centurion's comments: ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, παρ' οὐδενὶ τοσαύτην πίστιν ἐν τῷ Ἰσραὴλ εὔρον... πολλοὶ ἀπὸ ἀνατολῶν καὶ δυσμῶν ἤξουσιν καὶ ἀνακλιθήσονται μετὰ Ἀβραάμ καὶ Ἰσαὰκ καὶ Ἰακώβ ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν (Matt 8:10b-11). This statement echoes Ps. 107:1-3, "O give thanks to the Lord... he redeemed... and gathered in from the lands, from the east, and from the west, from the north and from the south." The first statement of Jesus shows that among his people he never found such an understanding of his messianic identity and role, and the second states that non-Judeans will partake in the breaking-in of the kingdom and will benefit from such manifestations as were widely expressed and anticipated in the Judean literature. Thus, the analogy used by the centurion demonstrates his understanding of the inbreaking of the kingdom

through Jesus,<sup>49</sup> the Messiah, and its implication for the non-Judeans—partaking in its benefits like healing.

Though in the story the centurion is depicted as a minor character with no character development which may mean that the implied reader cannot identify with him (Syreeni, 2004: 120), there is a development in the relationship between the centurion and Jesus in the narrative. The implied reader observes the development of the relationship between them from the narrator's perspective, which is the way the implied reader walks with the main character and sees his actions and hears his words. But it is not limited to that: sometimes the implied reader knows the inner thoughts and emotions of the main character from their evaluative point of view. In this passage, from the evaluative point of view of Jesus, the main character, the implied reader will be amazed by the centurion's faith. The centurion's actions, his speech, Jesus' speech, and the contrasting example of Jesus' encounters in Israel, all help to shape the reader's perception of the centurion, and probably their perception of the non-Judean category too. Furthermore, as Luz writes,

It emphasizes the faith of the centurion and gives the readers courage in their own faith. The centurion becomes for them a character with whom they can identify... the story thus becomes transparent for the readers' own experience. The granting of the centurion's request becomes the promise to the church that lives by virtue of its Lord's support. (Luz, 2001:12)

Allison recognises the importance of Matt. 8:11-12 for the symbolic signification of the story. He contends that, by linking Jesus' saying in Matt. 8:11-12 with the story of the centurion, the implied author transformed the individual story into a collective story, the story of the reconstitution of the people of God (see Allison Jr., 1989). However, using narrative criticism only based on the centurion story (i.e., his action and character) without the programmatic saying of Jesus in Matt. 8:11-12, does not enable us to see the ideological role, the symbolic signification of the centurion. I will argue that using Barthes' semiological reading method as a

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<sup>49</sup> The centurion understood the messianic authority of Jesus, manifested by his healing power. That is why he used the analogy and pleaded with him to heal his servant. Thus, the analogy used by the centurion implies his recognition of the coming of the kingdom of heaven which is tied with Jesus' messianic authority.

heuristic tool will solve the problem of identifying the symbolic signification of the story of the centurion.

#### **7.4. The story of the healing of the centurion's servant as a foundation for non-Judean participation in the kingdom blessings**

The association of the story of the centurion (Matt. 8:5-10), who is characterised positively, with Jesus' saying in Matt. 8:11-12, makes it easy to see its possible symbolic signification for the realisation of the inclusion of non-Judeans. However, in the light of Jesus' stereotypical labelling of non-Judeans as other in his teaching on the mountain, the positive characterisation of the centurion and its symbolic signification need further exploration. What was the author's ideological intention in including the story of the centurion's servant's healing in its specific structural placement? Is the centurion an example of the "many" who participate in the eschatological feast? Or is he a symbol used by the implied author to argue for the inclusion of non-Judeans, that is, is it an ideological weapon of the implied author? If it is an ideological weapon, what is the ideological stand the implied author was asserting using this story? In the following section, an attempt will be made to answer these questions. Furthermore, I will argue that the story has an ideological role and is aimed at reconstituting the boundary of the people of God (cf. Konradt, 2014:336).

##### **7.4.1. Semiological reading of the story of the healing of the centurion's servant**

The symbolic signification of the centurion is often either overlooked or dominated by the exposition of Jesus' reply to his action in Matt. 8:11-12. Though indeed Jesus' programmatic saying in reply to the centurion's faith in 8:11-12 is significant for understanding what the implied author hoped to communicate through the story, I will argue that the placement of the story by itself in both its literary and socio-historical context, shows that the story has symbolic signification. This symbolic signification can be explored using Barthes' semiological reading as a heuristic tool.

As argued above, the positive characterisation of the non-Judean centurion is contrary to Jesus' depiction of non-Judeans throughout the gospel. Among other characters which the implied author characterised positively, the centurion's recognition of God's authority directly fits with the placement of the story in the gospel.

However, in connection with Jesus' programmatic saying (Matt. 8:11-12), Matthean scholars have long recognised that Jesus' healing ministry among the non-Judeans shows that the benefits the Messiah brought for Judeans were for non-Judeans too, and that the faith of the centurion is a "foreshadowing of the ingathering of the gentiles" (Talbert, 2010: 114). Similarly, Luz contends:

The comment to the crowd that "follows" makes clear that the evangelist here consciously leaves the surface of the narrative and speaks on his deeper level. To this point Jesus has met few people; he has not yet had a single negative experience in Israel, yet v. 10 already assumes that Jesus' experience with Israel is going to be negative. The Matthean church knows that this is true both from the totality of Jesus' story and from its own experience in Israel. Thus vv. 10–12 have the character of a "signal" of what is to come. (Luz, 2001: 10)

This understanding of the text is in line with the Old Testament prophets who predicted the day when non-Judeans would come to the God of Israel (cf. Isa. 2:2-4; Jer. 3:17; Mic. 4:1-2; Zech. 8:20-22; *Tob.* 14:57). France contends that the author of Matthew used the story of the centurion with other stories in his narrative as a model in which he showed that the gospel which came for Israel also included others who might partake in it (France, 2007: 315).

However, as I will argue next, the story of the centurion does not necessarily need the logion of Jesus in Matt. 8:11-12 to communicate the author's programmatic ideological theme of the inclusion of non-Judeans in the reconstituted people of God. The other occurrences of non-Judeans (i.e., the four non-Judeans in the genealogy account, the Magi, and the Canaanite woman) which have symbolic signification of the inclusion of non-Judeans into the reconstituted people of God, did not require other supportive discourse to imply the theme of the ingathering of non-Judeans. Therefore, the story of the healing of the centurion's servant can in its own right be understood as a symbolic representation of the anticipated ingathering of non-Judeans and the reconstitution of God's people if it is read through the lens of Barthes' semiological reading method.

#### ***7.4.1.1. The first order semiological reading of the story of the healing of the centurion's servant (Matt. 8:5-13)***

##### *(1) Introduction*

Petersen notes that narrative is a typical means of communication, a message communicated from the author to the reader (Petersen, 1978: 33-34). Though the Gospel of Matthew is a narrative book, its meaning cannot be explicated using only narrative criticism as a heuristic tool. Rather, the context in which the text was written and read also has a significant role in revealing possible meanings, because there is a strong link between the narrative world and the world to which the narrative is referring, as well as to the world with which it is associated, the contextual world. Therefore, a methodology that helps us to analyse these worlds needs to be implemented to grasp the meanings the narrative is intended to communicate. As shown, narrative criticism reading tools can be used to analyse the narrative world of the text; however, this method does not reveal the intended effect of the narrative on its audience. Therefore, a methodology is needed which can be fused with narrative criticism and that is also capable of showing the effect of the narrative on the reader. A semiological reading is such a method, which treats the narrative as a sign that is produced by the society, and therefore demands semiological and cultural analysis (Elliott, 2014:87). As a semiological reading is a structural analysis, it makes a distinction between means (signifier) and message (signified) as well as between the text and its context.

Therefore, according to our description of Barthes' semiological reading in Chapter Three, the story of the healing of the centurion's servant in Matt. 8:5-13 will be analysed using Barthes' semiological order reading: both the first semiological order reading and the second semiological order reading. In the first semiological order reading, the focus of analysis will be on how the story in Matt. 8:5-13 communicates its message. Therefore, the focus of this analysis will use narrative criticism as a heuristic tool, employing the categories of narration, narrator, characterisation, rhetorical techniques, plot, narrative structure, and so on. However, in the second semiological order reading, the focus of analysis will be on the reasons why the author used the specific story (i.e., in our case, the story of the centurion) in a given socio-culturally situated context to communicate the message explicated in the first order semiological reading. Therefore, it is an analysis of the context (see 7.2).

In this section, I have three aims. First, I will survey scholarly endeavours to situate the passage in the whole narrative and its implication for explicating its intended meaning. I will also suggest the structure adopted in this study, the placement of this passage in the structure, and the intended meaning of the passage. Second, I will explore the story of the centurion in Matt. 8:5-13 using Barthes' semiological reading method to determine the first order meaning of the story. Finally, I will analyse the passage using the same reading method to explore its second order semiological meaning.

(2) *The first mythological order in the semiological reading of Matt. 8:5-13*

We have briefly seen how the structure of Matthew influences the meaning of the miracle stories (Matt. 8-9) in general and Matt. 8:5-13 in particular. According to Barthes' semiological reading of the narrative, the first mythological order is "equivalent to *fabula*,<sup>50</sup> which in turn comprises multiple characters, events and settings as they relate to one another in terms of historical time and space" (Smit, 1994c: 45). Therefore, it would be the meaning of the story in its narrative world. For, as Chatman contends,

What does narrative itself (or narrativizing a text) mean? The *signifiés* or signifieds are exactly three—event, character, and detail of setting; the *signifiants* or signifiers are those elements in the narrative statement... that can stand for one of these three, thus any kind of physical or mental action for the first, any person (or, indeed, any entity that can be personalized) for the second, and any evocation of place for the third. (Chatman, 1978: 25)

The story of the healing of the centurion's servant is the first mythological order in which the centurion and Jesus are the main characters of the story, the faith of the centurion and the healing power of Jesus are described as elements of the story, and Capernaum is the physical setting of the story. The centurion's marginality is also implied in the story, as part of its social setting. Furthermore, Chatman contends that "narrative structure imparts meanings... precisely because it can endow an otherwise meaningless ur-text with eventhood, characterhood, and settinghood, in a normal one-to-one standing-for relationship" (1978:25). Therefore, as mentioned previously, in the structural analysis of the whole narrative, as well as its implication

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<sup>50</sup> Fabula is the Russian formalist term for the "logical, chronological sequence of events" underlying the narrative.

for miracle stories in Matthew 8-9, particularly in Matt. 8:5-3, the story is intended to communicate the identity of Jesus, one of the main characters, in the narrative world, who has authority over disease and has compassion for the marginalised, such as the non-Judean centurion, the other character in the story. This is the first mythological order of the story.

In the first semiological order, the signifier is the story of the healing of the centurion's servant by Jesus and the signified (concept/meaning) is the healing authority of Jesus, the saviour-king. Thus, the sign of the first mythological order of the story is the healing authority of Jesus, which is manifested by the healing of the centurion's servant.

Though the centurion is depicted positively by the implied author, and though his faith is also appreciated by Jesus, which indicates the narrator's point of view, and though the marginality of the centurion which reflects the social setting of the society can also be discerned in the story, the point the implied author is making, is not about him. It is about the identity of Jesus and his authority over disease. This authority is related to his being the saviour-king, which the implied author attempted to portray from the beginning. His authority is manifested in his teaching in Matthew 5-7 and Matthew 8-9, and his authority over disease is portrayed through his deeds. Therefore, the sign of the first mythological order is the authority of Jesus over diseases, which is manifested by healing the servant of the centurion.

*(3) The second mythological order in the healing story of the centurion's servant (Matt. 8:5-13) and its foundational role*

As stated in Chapter Three, the signifier of the second mythological order is the empty form of the sign of the first mythological order, which is a combination of the signifier and signified (concept) in the first mythological order (Barthes, 1972:113). Therefore, if the sign of the first mythological order is the narrative of the text, "the second order mythological signifier is equivalent to what we may call 'the narrative text as empty form'. The narrative text is emptied of and is a distortion of the first order (hi)story" (Smit, 1994c: 45). Then this sign, as a "narrative text as empty form" in the second mythological order, will be filled with the signified concept from the contextual world. This "concept posits, fill, motivates and determines the significance of the narrative text" (Smit, 1994c: 45).



Thus, the story of the healing of the servant of the centurion (Matt. 8:5-13) was intended to communicate a message related to the identity of Jesus in the narrative world. As argued in the above section, this is the first mythological order. However, the narrative of the text, the sign of the first mythological order, when emptied of its meaning and having become an empty form, will be filled with another meaning/concept obtained from the contemporary contextual world to become the signification (sign) in the second mythological order, to give the meaning which the author wanted to address through the story. This is the means through which the implied author reflects his ideology, his point of view. The issue of non-Judeans being beneficiaries of the messianic blessings, such as healing, was contested in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. Furthermore, contrary to the otherness of non-Judeans as a social norm, which is reflected even in the narrative world of the Gospel of Matthew through the stereotypical labelling of non-Judeans in Jesus' teachings, the non-Judean centurion is characterised positively. Therefore, I contend that the meaning/concept which fills this empty form is the inclusion of non-Judeans to be recipients of the messianic blessings.

According to the above narrative structural analysis, all the miracles in Matthew 8-9 happened in marginalised social-cultural settings, i.e., people who were lepers, non-Judeans, or Peter's mother-in-law. These cultural elements of the narrative may not be understood by merely applying narrative criticism, but the semiological reading tool enables us to explore the implications of the healing of culturally marginalised people. The second order mythological reading helps us to see the symbolic signification of the healing stories in their social and cultural context. Thus the first semiological order meaning of the story of the healing of the centurion's servant:

*First order meaning: signifier* (The story of the healing of the centurion's servant by Jesus) + *signified* (the healing authority of Jesus, the saviour-king) = *the sign* (the healing authority of Jesus, which is manifested by the healing of the centurion's servant).

The second semiological order meaning of the story of the healing of the centurion's servant:

*Second order meaning: signifier* (The healing authority of Jesus, which is manifested by the healing of the centurion's servant) + *signified* (+ the inclusion of non-Judeans to be the recipients of the messianic blessings) = *the sign* (the healing authority of Jesus that

is manifested through the healing of the centurion's servant symbolically signifies the inclusion of non-Judeans to be the recipients of the messianic blessings).

#### **7.4.2. The role of the story of the healing of the centurion's servant, as a non-Judean character, in forming the identity of the ideal readers' community**

If the mythological signification of the healing story of the centurion's servant is non-Judean participation in the blessings of the kingdom, which is brought by the saviour-king, then the story has a role in forming the identity of the community of ideal readers. The story is not just an example of non-Judeans who benefited from the kingdom's blessings or justification for non-Judeans participating in it. If it is only an example, it loses the full extent of its truthfulness, and if it is an alibi, it is too obvious. If the story of the healing of the centurion's servant served as an example to show that non-Judeans can also receive healing, it would have lost the full meaning the implied author wanted to communicate through the story. Furthermore, if the purpose of the story was just to justify non-Judeans receiving healing, it would be too obvious and the story would not function as a myth. As explained in Chapter Three, for anyone who is reading the myth, "everything happens as if the picture [in our case the story] *naturally* conjured up the concept as if the signifier *gave a foundation* to the signified" (Barthes, 1972:129, his emphases). Furthermore, according to this reading, the consumer of myth, "the reader lives the myth as a story at once true and unreal" (Barthes, 1972:127). Therefore, though the story of the healing of the centurion's servant could have been real, it does not necessarily reflect the inclusive nature of the addressed community, which is contrary to the assumptions of most Matthean scholars. It is unreal because it does not reflect reality on the ground. Rather, it shows the intention of the implied author. The story itself, as it is consumed by readers, naturally invokes the concept of non-Judean participation in the kingdom, it gives a foundation for the participation of non-Judeans in the blessings of the kingdom, and their participation changed the composition of the 1<sup>st</sup>-century Christian community. Thus, it reshaped the boundary of the community; it determined who is in and out of the community. As we shall see in detail in the next section (7.2), this is further attested to by Jesus' saying in Matt. 8:11-12.

### **7.4.3. The story of the healing of the centurion's servant as a foundation for non-Judean participation in the kingdom blessings: A means of identity formation**

So far, we have seen how the implied author used this story to communicate the concept of non-Judean participation in the kingdom blessings. In this section, using Barthes' semiological second order reading method as a heuristic tool, I will argue that this idea is used by the author to form the social identity of the ideal readers' community.

As Barthes says, the proper way of reading myth, is with a "focus on the mythical signifier [second order signifier] as on an inextricable whole made of meaning [i.e., meaning from the first order] and form [i.e., filled with and naturalised by the mythical concept]" (Barthes, 1972:127). This type of focus is dynamic: "it consumes the myth according to the very ends built into its structure: the reader lives the myth as a story at once true and unreal" (Barthes, 1972:127). However, those who focus on the myth's empty signifier will fill the form with the concept without any ambiguity, thus, the signification of the story will be literal—an example, or a symbol (Barthes, 1972:127). Furthermore, Barthes contends, if the focus of the myth-reader is on a full signifier, in which the meaning and the form are distinguished, along with "the distortion which the one imposes on the other, I undo the signification of the myth, and I receive the latter as an imposture" (Barthes, 1972:127), thus the story will be an alibi, a justification.

As already discussed, Barthes explains how these foci affect the reading of myth using an example he took from a photograph of a young black soldier in a French uniform saluting on the cover of the news magazine *Paris-Match*:

If I read the [Black soldier's]-saluting as a symbol pure and simple of imperialism, I must renounce the reality of the picture, it discredits itself in my eyes when it becomes an instrument. Conversely, if I decipher the [Black soldier's] salute as an alibi of coloniality, I shatter the myth even more surely by the obviousness of its motivation. But for the myth-reader, the outcome is quite different: everything happens as if the picture *naturally* conjured up the concept as if the signifier *gave a foundation* to the signified: the myth exists from the precise moment when French imperialism achieves the natural state. (Barthes, 1972:129)

Similarly, the story of the healing of the centurion's servant, as a kingdom blessing which is demonstrated through the healing authority of the saviour-king, is a sign of the first mythological order. This sign will be the signifier for the second mythological order. In the second mythological order, this signifier is on one hand full of historical meaning, and on the other hand it is an empty form (i.e., put aside from its historical meaning). The empty form of the second mythological order is filled with a concept for the cultural context in which the myth is consumed. It is an area in which the implied author operated to fill what is emptied and distorted. The concept which fills the narrative text is an ideology which the implied author wanted to promote through the story of the healing of the centurion's servant.

If the focus of our reading is on the empty form of the story, in which the meaning of the story of the healing of the centurion's servant is detached from its historical meaning, as the signifier of the second mythological order, the centurion who received the benefit through his action will be an example or symbol of those who will benefit from the blessings of the kingdom. The problem of such a reading is, as Barthes contends, that the reader must "renounce the reality of the [story], it discredits itself in [the reader's] eyes when it becomes an instrument" (Barthes, 1972:128-129). If the focus of our reading is on the full meaning of the story of the healing of the centurion's servant as a signifier of the second mythical order, i.e., non-Judean participation in the kingdom benefits, and compare it with the full meaning of the sign of the first order, i.e., the authority of Jesus over disease, which is manifested through the unleashing of the kingdom benefits, then the story will be understood as an alibi, a justification for non-Judeans participating in the kingdom blessings through Jesus' triumph over diseases. This means non-Judeans would receive the benefit of participating in the kingdom blessings because Jesus had authority over diseases. As Barthes argues, the problem of such a reading of myth, is that "I shatter the myth even more surely by the obviousness of its motivation" (Barthes, 1972:129). However, if the focus of our reading is the healing of the centurion's servant as it is understood naturally as identifying the beneficiaries of the kingdom blessings that are assured by Jesus, the saviour-king, the story is neither an example nor an alibi for the inclusion of non-Judeans to be the beneficiaries of the kingdom blessings. Rather, the centurion being a partaker of the benefits of the kingdom blessings reveals the realisation of the anticipated inclusion of non-Judeans into the kingdom.

In the context in which Judeans' association with non-Judeans was disputable, the story of the healing of the centurion's servant had signification to inform the ideology the implied author was urging the implied readers to adopt. If the story of the healing of the centurion's servant, as myth, in its second mythological order, connoted the meaning that non-Judeans (i.e., the outsiders, the marginalised) benefited from the kingdom blessings, which were thought to be only for a certain group, the ideal readers' community, i.e., the Judeans, it shows the boundary of the community of the beneficiaries were either compromised or redefined. As McCutcheon contends, myth is more than a "social argumentation found in all humanity" (McCutcheon, 2000:200) or a means through which a society "reflects, expresses, explores, and legitimizes their own self-image" (McCutcheon, 2000:200); it is an ideological weapon through which a society forms and reforms its identity. It is an "ideology in narrative form" (Lincoln, 1999b:xii). Thus, the story of the healing of the centurion's servant as a signifier of the second mythological order naturally invokes the concept of non-Judean participation in the kingdom blessings, because this signifier is the foundation for the signified—the concept of non-Judean participation in the blessings of the kingdom. This concept is an ideology the implied author wanted to pursue. Therefore, in the context in which the kingdom blessings were thought to be only for Judeans, the story of the centurion had a role in forming the identity of the community of people who are entitled to benefit from the blessings.

## 7.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I demonstrated how the implied author used the story of the healing of the centurion's servant to form the identity of the ideal readers' community. In this story, contrary to the author's general negative characterisation of non-Judeans (see Chapter Four), the centurion is portrayed positively. I have argued that in such a literary context as well as a social context in which non-Judeans were seen as others, this positive characterisation of him has symbolic signification. It signifies an idea of non-Judean inclusion into the ideal readers' community. If non-Judeans are legitimised to be included as partakers of the messianic blessings, this shows the social boundary that excluded non-Judeans and perceived them as outsiders, was either compromised or demolished. Being recipients of the messianic blessing was no longer based on being part of the Judean community, but rather by acknowledging the God of Israel and the authority he bestowed on the Messiah. Therefore, I argue that the implied author used the story to reshape the social identity of the ideal readers' community.

The study has demonstrated that the story of the healing of the centurion's servant has a role in forming the identity of the ideal readers' community. The centurion is characterised positively in his act of appealing on the behalf of his servant, as a person who acknowledges the God of Israel and his Messiah, whose identity is manifested through his healing activity. These characterisations are contrary to the stereotypical negative labelling of non-Judeans by the Matthean Jesus in his teachings on the mountain. Since the implied author characterised the centurion positively in the story, the story plays a symbolic representational role that forms an identity of the ideal readers' community. Using Barthes' semiological reading method, the study also shows how the story symbolically represents the participation of non-Judeans in the messianic blessings, which in turn, I argue, reshapes the composition of the recipients of the messianic blessings. In the first semiological order, the healing story of the centurion's servant in Matt. 8:5-13 signifies the healing authority of Jesus. However, the mythological signification of this story is the non-Judean participation in the blessings of the kingdom, which are brought by the saviour-king. Therefore, this story has a role in forming the identity of the community of ideal readers because it reconstitutes the recipients of the kingdom blessings.

The next chapter will examine the role of positively depicted Canaanite woman (Matt. 15:21-28) in the Matthean narrative in forming the identity of the ideal readers' community.

## Chapter Eight

### 8. The healing of the Canaanite woman's daughter: A case for reshaping the identity of the ideal community

#### 8.1. Introduction

This chapter will argue that, like the story of the healing of the centurion's servant (Matt. 8:5-13), the story of the Canaanite woman's daughter (Matt. 15:21-28) has ramifications for the construction of the identity of the ideal readers' community, the 1<sup>st</sup>-century Christian community. Scholars like Bultmann even contend that the similarity is not limited to the idea that the implied author intended to communicate through the stories; the two stories may be viewed as variations of a similar occurrence (Bultmann, 1968: 38). The two stories indeed have many similarities: 1) both involve non-Judeans; 2) both address Jesus as "lord" (κύριε in 8:6, 8; cf. Matt. 15:22, 25, 27); 3) both plead for help for members of their household who are suffering terribly (Matt. 8:6; cf. Matt. 15:22); 4) both meet with an initial rebuff from Jesus (Matt. 8:7; cf. Matt. 15:23-26); 5) in dialogue with Jesus, both demonstrate exceptional faith (Matt. 8:8-9; cf. Matt. 15:22-27); 6) both elicit from Jesus comment about their remarkable faith (Matt. 8:10; cf. Matt. 15:28); 7) both receive the healing they request (Matt. 8:13; cf. Matt. 15:28). In both stories, the non-Judean characters' acts of faith enable them to receive healing from Jesus' hand; furthermore, both stories play a significant role in explicating the portrayal of the non-Judean characters in the Matthean narratives.

The story of the Canaanite woman is another occurrence in the Gospel of Matthew in which non-Judeans are positively characterised (cf. Matt. 2:1-12; 8:5-13). This passage is considered by most exegetes as a difficult passage (Lee & Viljoen, 2010:77) based on Jesus' harsh reply to the Canaanite woman's request, Jesus' exclusive commission to the disciples (Matt. 10:5-6), and Jesus' statement about his exclusive mission (cf. Matt. 15:24). Some scholars contend that the appeal of the Canaanite woman created a suitable occasion for Jesus to articulate both the exclusive nature of his mission (Matt. 15:24; cf. 10:5-6) and Israel's salvation-historical primacy (Matt. 15:26) (Viljoen, 2007:701). Though in the end, the woman's faith wins, in Jesus' answer to her request (Matt. 15:28) there is no hint that this salvation-historical focus upon Israel is temporary. France comments on this ambiguity:

The narrative itself negates the apparent absoluteness of 15:24. Jesus is sent to the lost sheep outside the house of Israel; there is plenty of bread for the ‘dogs’ as well! The whole story is one which, if read with wooden literalism, gives good reason to complain of the ‘chauvinistic’ attitude it displays, but which, if read within its total literary context and with a due openness to a dialogue conducted not so much by sober propositions as by verbal fencing, fits well into Matthew’s theology of Jesus as the Messiah of Israel—and of all those who respond in faith. (France, 1989: 234)

John Meier, using redaction criticism as a heuristic tool to interpret the story of the Canaanite woman (Mark 7:24-30; cf. Matt. 15:21-28), contends that in the historical context in which the mission to non-Judeans was disputed, this story, rather than showing the concern of the historical Jesus, is “so shot through with Christian missionary theology and concerns that creation by first-generation Christians is the more likely conclusion” (Meier, 1994: 660-661). On the other hand, Stuart L. Love uses a socio-scientific reading method in combination with redaction criticism to interpret the story and concludes that Matthew’s redaction of Mark’s content does not necessarily lead us to the conclusion that Matthew is further removed from the historical Jesus; to the contrary, the Gospel of Matthew reflects the historical ministry of Jesus as well as reflecting the social and theological concerns of its community (Love, 2002: 11-20).

Matthean scholars who have studied the healing of the Canaanite woman focus either on the historical issues in the referential world of the text or the contextual world, and the meaning of the story in itself is often neglected in both approaches. Thus, in this section, I will attempt to explore the meaning of the story itself, using the socio-narrative reading approach, which is explicated in Chapter Three of this dissertation, and see how the implied author intended his story of the healing of the Canaanite woman to be received by the implied readers. I will argue that reading the story of the Canaanite woman using Barthes’ semiological reading method will help us to see the symbolic signification of the story, which redefines the identity of the recipients of the messianic blessings, therefore, it has an identity forming role.

## **8.2. The otherness of the Canaanite woman**

The implied author used various literary means to show the otherness or the outsidership of the Canaanite woman as a non-Judean. This is reflected in the placement of the story in the narrative, in the geographical location in which the reported event took place, in its referring to



the woman as Canaanite, in the disciples' appeal to "send her away" and Jesus' two responses to her supplication (Matt. 15:21-28).

The story of the Canaanite woman in the Gospel of Matthew comes immediately after Jesus had a strong dispute with the Pharisees and scribes regarding their traditions (see Matt. 15:1-11) and his teaching about what was clean and unclean for his disciples (see Matt. 15:12-20). This passage set the stage for the story of the Canaanite woman, who, as a non-Judean, was considered unclean.<sup>51</sup> Jesus' teaching in Matt. 15:10-20 about what is clean and unclean is a kind of transition to the pericope in which the story of the Canaanite woman is recorded (Matt. 15:21-28). "Matthew shows the woman coming from both regions [Tyre and Sidon], regions he understood to be typically wicked [Matt. 11:21-2]" (Duncan Derrett, 1973:164). Byrne contends that this pericope is "a direct encounter between Jesus and a representative of the (unclean) Gentile world" (Byrne, 2002: 68).

As Van Staden (1991:187) argues, a discussion on purity is related to the identity of the community—who is included or excluded from society—because it determines what is right in a certain place and time (DeSilva, 2000: 243). It is also a means through which a society demarcates the inside from the outside (Malina and Pilch, 1993: 151). Furthermore, Malina and Pilch (1993:35) argue that the cleanness and uncleanness of something are related to its placement in a society; therefore, it is a means through which society draws its boundaries. Thus, the placement of the story of the Canaanite woman, coming right after the story of Jesus' dispute with the Pharisees and scribes on cleanness and uncleanness, seems intentional, and helps to communicate the outsidership of the woman. In the 1<sup>st</sup>-century socio-cultural context Judeans considered themselves as not only chosen people but also racially pure, the only legitimate heirs of the messianic blessings. Therefore, racial purity has a significant role in their discourses (Ferguson, 1987: 427).

Despite these social norms, Jesus crosses the boundary of impurity and goes to the region of the non-Judeans, where he grants the messianic blessings to the Canaanite woman and her daughter, who are considered illegitimate to receive such blessings (Kgatle, 2018:604). "Jesus' rebuke of the Pharisees and scribes is intensified by his movements since he leaves the land and

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<sup>51</sup> For the uncleanness or impurity of non-Judeans, see the discussion in 5.4.1.

the people who are ‘clean’, to enter a land that is ‘unclean’” (O’Day, 2001:115). Byrne rightly contends that the pericope should be treated as “a direct encounter between Jesus and a representative of the (unclean) Gentile world” (Byrne, 2002: 68). This shows that the author is involved in the project of renaming the beneficiaries, i.e., redefining the boundary of the ideal readers’ community.

Furthermore, the geographical location, Tyre and Sidon, where the Canaanite woman meets Jesus (Matt. 15:21) is theologically significant. The way the implied author framed her approach to Jesus from a specific geographical perspective reflects her outsidership: γυνή Χαναναία ἀπὸ τῶν ὁρίων ἐκείνων “a Canaanite woman from that vicinity” (Matt. 15:22). Here, τῶν ὁρίων ἐκείνων refers to the geographical regions mentioned in v. 21. These geographical locations were considered impure places from the Jewish perspective (Shin, 2014: 5). Gundry argues that these cities were “heathen cities” which were hostile to the Israelites (cf. Isa. 23; Jer. 25:22; 27:3; 47:4; Ezek. 26-28; Joel 3:4) (Gundry, 1994:214). Those who were living in these cities are mentioned in the Old Testament, not only as enemies of the people of Israel “because of their foreign gods”, who were subjected to God’s wrath (cf. Isa. 23; Ezek. 26-28) (cf. Newsom, 1984:125-164) but also as very skilful people from whom the people of Israel benefited (Kgatlé, 2018:600). However, in this context, it seems that the cities are mentioned in terms of their enmity. As Derrett argues, “[i]n the Old Testament Tyre is proud and inimical to the Israelites” (Derrett, 1973:164). As we shall see later, the way the implied author referred to the woman as a Canaanite, as well as how the author described an unpleasant conversation she had with Jesus, implies the negative connotation of the names of the cities in the context (Kgatlé, 2018:600). Therefore, Jesus’s move to these cities is considered as moving from a clean to an unclean place (Shin, 2014: 5), denoting the otherness of the woman.

As discussed in Chapter Four, one of the ways by which the implied author characterised the non-Judeans as others, as outsiders, was through characterising them as worshipers of other gods than the God of Israel. The geographical location in which the event took place, shows the demarcation line, the boundary between Judeans and non-Judeans. The intentionality of the move is clear from the word ἀνεχώρησεν (to withdraw, Matt. 15:21), though this time it is not to Galilee but outside the boundary of Israel (Good, 1990:4; Kgatlé, 2018). Therefore, the geographical place where Jesus met the Canaanite woman, Tyre and Sidon, seems to have been mentioned by the implied author intentionally to characterise the woman as an outsider who is

an enemy of God and a worshiper of other gods (cf. Josh. 13:6; Judg. 10:6, 12; Jer. 47:4). This probably reflects 1<sup>st</sup>-century Judeans' sentiment towards non-Judeans, the outsiders. By doing this, the implied author highlighted the otherness of non-Judeans, the difference between Judeans and non-Judeans, which is later reversed by Jesus' commendation of the woman's faith (Matt. 15:28).

In the story, the implied author used the stereotype term Canaanite to refer to the woman (Sim, 1998:223; Beare, 1984:241; Harrington, 1991:235; Levine, 1988:138-139; Davies and Allison, 2004:547). This kind of stereotyping "in terms of locale,<sup>52</sup> trade or class,<sup>53</sup> but especially according to the family clan<sup>54</sup> or faction in which they are embedded" (Malina and Neyrey, 1988:15) is common in the Gospel of Matthew as well as in the New Testament (see Jackson, 2002:151-153). Cornelius (2011:36) argues that the term Canaanites is used in the Old Testament in a negative stereotypical manner and it is even equivalent to "opponent"; therefore, the Judeans neither allowed them to be part of their community nor permitted them to intermarry. Thus, the term is used to designate any non-Judean, either by race or religion. Furthermore, as Jackson (2002:61) rightly notes, the term Canaanite might have been recognised by the community "for the stereotype it invokes".

However, scholars do not agree on what the term Canaanite invokes: religion or geography. For instance, Nolland argues that "[t]he choice of 'Canaanite' is archaising, designed to evoke scriptural images of the original inhabitants of Palestine as objects of scorn and enemies of Israel" (Nolland, 2005: 631-632). However, Roy A. Harrisville (1966:280), using redaction criticism, contends that the descriptions of the woman as a Syrophoenician in the Mark 7:26 and as a Canaanite woman in Matt. 15:23 have political and religious connotations respectively. Furthermore, the "use of the word is for the purpose of heightening the religious opposition between Israel and the Gentiles" (Harrisville, 1966: 281). On the basis of the Hebrew tradition which forbade Jews to associate or even touch non-Judeans, Selvidge (1948:79) proposes a similar line of thought, saying that "by using the word Canaan, Matthew

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<sup>52</sup> Cf. Matt. 27:32.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Matt. 26:6; 27:57.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Matt. 27:55-56.

stirs up... ancient fear and perhaps hatred of the foreigner, the unknown one—the one that became the enemy of Abraham.” Furthermore, Rukundwa & Van Aarde (2005:942) point out that the Canaanites as a community of people no longer existed in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, but the term was widely used to stereotypically signify a disgraceful people. Joel Willitts (2009:5) argues that the pejorative term Canaanite was not used by the implied author merely to evoke the idea of their enmity with Israel, but rather reveals his concern for “the status of non-Israelite subjects within the restored kingdom of Israel” through revealing the identity of the woman.<sup>55</sup>

As seen in section 5.3, where I dealt with the non-Judeans in the genealogy, and the seeming contradiction between the books of Ruth and Deuteronomy regarding forbidding conversion of the Moabites to become part of the Jewish community, most scholars contend that the prohibition was only for males. Jackson argues that the women in the genealogy as well as in the present passage, were included to show the possibility that “the women of enemy people may convert to Judaism” (Jackson, 2002: 85). He further argues that “the term ‘Canaanite’ is the key to understanding the woman’s activity as representing that of a female proselyte in Matthew’s religious community” (Jackson, 2002: 60). However, to sustain his argument, two questions need to be answered: (1) How does he know that the woman represents the female proselyte in the Matthean community, for the presence of the character in the story, in the narrative world, does not necessarily reflect the situation in the contextual world unless one subscribes to a mirror-reading method, which Matthean scholars lately reject (cf. Bauckham, 1998c)? (2) If the presence of the non-Judean characters in the Matthean account communicated the possibility of conversion to Judaism or the status of the proselyte in the Matthean community, what difference does it make, unless we argue that the Gospel of Matthew advocates proselytisation? In this line of argument, the presence of non-Judean characters in the story do not add anything other than stating the obvious facts; it does not advance a new ideology or challenge the existing pattern of thinking, because in the 1<sup>st</sup>-century context non-Judeans were allowed to be a part of the Judean community through proselytisation. I argue to the contrary that the characters communicate the idea of being members of the community without changing their identity. If non-Judeans became part of the community without being converted

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<sup>55</sup> For those who advocate the term evoking enmity with Israel, see Keener (1999:414); Meier (1980:172); Nolland (2005:631-632); and Senior (1999:181).

to Judaism through proselytisation, that would change the social makeup of the community; therefore, the community redefines its own identity, its composition, and its boundaries. Thus, the woman is not just a representative of the non-Judean world; she is a realisation and a foundation of the inclusion of non-Judeans in the community, and rightful beneficiaries of the messianic blessings (see 4.1.2).

As Shin (2014:5) rightly points out, the implied author deliberately labelled the woman: “she was an enemy of Israel”. Carter (2000:321-322) also contends that the Canaanites were the enemies of the Judeans. Similarly, Sim argues that the way the author refers to the woman reflects the “negative attitude towards the original Gentile inhabitants of the land of Israel” (Sim, 1998: 223). Therefore, the derogatory term used for the woman by the implied author and the description of the geographical setting where the story takes place, prove that the woman was considered as an outsider of the community, who was not a legitimate beneficiary of the community. This literary mechanism of characterising the woman in terms of being a Canaanite, evokes their religious hatred and enmity with Israelites (Presler, 2010: 201). It was purposefully designed to emphasise the differentiation between Jesus and the woman, who was considered an adversary, not of his sort. Thus, this is a literary mechanism through which the implied author emphasised the outsidership of the woman.

Another means through which the implied author depicted the foreignness of the woman, is his description of the way the Matthean Jesus’ disciples presented the woman’s case before Jesus: καὶ προσελθόντες οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ ἡρώτουν αὐτὸν λέγοντες· ἀπόλυσον αὐτήν, ὅτι κράζει ὀπίσθεν ἡμῶν, (“and his disciples having come to him, were asking him, saying, ‘dismiss her, for she calls out after us’”, Matt. 15:23). Some scholars appeal to the usual usage of ἀπολύω, which is not used in the New Testament in the sense of forcing someone out, but in this sentence where the disciples are presenting the woman’s case before Jesus positively, to solve their problem (Lee & Viljoen, 2010:80; cf. Davies and Allison, 2004:549; France, 2007:593; Hagner, 1995:441). They meant, “Do what she wants, so that she will go away” (France, 2007: 544). However, in the light of the 1<sup>st</sup>-century Jewish attitude towards non-Judeans, it is hard to imagine the implied author ascribing such a meaning (granting the benefits of the Messiah to the non-Judean) in whatever circumstances. Rather, ἀπόλυσον αὐτήν, meaning “dismiss her” or “send her away” in this context, is the disciples urging Jesus to tell her why he is not willing to heal her daughter. This is reflected in his silence in the first part of v. 23, ὁ δὲ οὐκ ἀπεκρίθη

ἀντὶ λόγον (“but he did not answer her a word”) and also what is expressed in vv. 24, 26. The disciples play the role of an obstacle to the woman’s pleading (Gundry, 1994:312-313; Theissen, 1983:53). Luz also contends that in the Matthean narrative we see the disciples playing this kind of negative role (cf. Matt. 14:15; 19:13) (Luz, 2001: 239). Therefore, I argue that the disciples seem to be uncomfortable, not only with the way she follows and yells after them, but also with her being a non-Judean and asking for benefits from the Messiah. This shows that the implied author, through the actions and words of the disciples, reflected the outsidership of the non-Judean woman.

Jesus’ act of ignoring the Canaanite woman when she first presents her appeal, and the seemingly unpleasant/discriminatory conversation he has with her after she persists in her pleading, also reflects the outsidership of the Canaanite woman as a non-Judean. At first, the way the woman is depicted presenting her request and also Jesus’ act of ignoring her request, seem to imply deliberate rejection. The woman is portrayed approaching Jesus and using the designation Son of David, which is understood by some Matthean scholars as referring to the author’s framing of Jesus’ healing ministry in the light of Jewish thinking about King Solomon (Duling, 1975:235-252; 1978:392-410). According to Davies and Allison, the phrase Son of David implies not only wisdom in the manner of King Solomon, but also, as reflected in some Jewish traditions such as the *Testament of Solomon* 20:1, Solomon was a great healer (Davies and Allison, 2004:136). Gundry argues that this phrase is used by the implied author to show the limitation of Jesus’ ministry as the Son of David (Gundry, 1994:311). Thus, the use of the phrase by the Canaanite woman, the non-Judean, is “a rhetorical device to make readers feel how absurd she is in asking such favor from Jesus” (Lee & Viljoen, 2010:80), because most Judeans believed that the Son of David referred to the Messiah for Judeans. Jesus’ refusal to reply to her request was also understood by readers within the Jewish framework of a messianic character, who brings messianic benefits to Judeans only. France contends that here “Jesus is acting the part of a traditional Jewish teacher” (France, 2007: 544). Therefore, on the one hand, it is a deliberate act of demarcation that excludes non-Judeans from the benefits that Jesus as the Son of David brought. The implied author, through reporting Jesus ignoring her request, intended to communicate that the Canaanite woman, as a non-Judean, was not entitled to receive the benefit, in this case, the healing that the Son of David brings. On the other hand, the implied author, by putting the phrase the Son of David in the woman’s mouth, showed that he wanted

to characterise the Canaanite woman positively, as one who understood the benefits that Jesus, as a messianic character, brought for non-Judeans (see 5.2.2.).

The use of the Son of David as demarcation is further supported by the way Jesus is depicted in the story explaining why she, as a non-Judean, could not benefit from his messianic blessings. However, some scholars argue that in Matt. 15:23 the disciples' action of submitting a request on behalf of the woman, presumed that Jesus would grant her request (Davies and Allison, 2004:549; France, 2007:593; Hagner, 1994:441; Beare, 1984:341; Burkill, 1967:161-177). Others contend that the disciples are depicted here as hindering the woman supplicant (Theissen, 1983:53; Gundry, 1994:312-313; Luz, 2001:339). I argue that the way the disciples urged Jesus to “send her away”, if understood as explaining the reason why she, as a non-Judean, could not benefit from the messianic blessings such as healing, better fits the context. This argument is further attested to by Jesus' next saying, οὐκ ἀπεστάλην εἰ μὴ εἰς τὰ πρόβατα τὰ ἀπολωλότα οἴκου Ἰσραὴλ, (“I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel”, Matt. 15:24; cf. Matt. 10:5-6). This demarcates the scope of his messianic ministry, which excluded non-Judeans from benefitting from his mission, and made the distinction between us and them—those who were legitimate beneficiaries and those who were not, respectively.

Furthermore, upon her insisting on his help, the phrase Jesus uses to reply to her request also emphasises the outsidership of the Canaanite woman: οὐκ ἔστιν καλὸν λαβεῖν τὸν ἄρτον τῶν τέκνων καὶ βαλεῖν τοῖς κυναρίοις, (“it is not good to take the children's bread and throw [it] to the dogs”, (Matt. 15:26). Here τὸν ἄρτον τῶν τέκνων (the children's bread) is a kind of parable which is understood by the woman as healing, a benefit of Jesus' ministry (Lee & Viljoen, 2010:81) in which the beneficiaries are those who are called children. Both in the Old and New Testaments, the Israelites are often called children (cf. Ex. 4:2; Deut. 14:1; Isa. 1:2, 4; 8:18; 30:1, 9; 43:5; Jer. 4:22; 31:17, 20; Lam. 1:5; Ezek. 20:21; Hos. 11:1; Matt. 3:9; 11:16-17; Luke 7:32; 15:31; John 11:52; Acts 13:26; Rom. 9:4). The derogatory term τοῖς κυναρίοις (Matt. 15:26), used here by Jesus to refer to the woman, confirms that she has no right to benefit from the messianic blessings of the children. It reflects the outsider status of the Canaanite woman. This kind of attitude towards non-Judeans was a common Jewish tradition (see *Targum Neofiti Exodus* 22:30). Therefore, using this parable, Jesus communicated to the woman, who is outside the boundary and thus not counted among the children, that she was not a recognised beneficiary of the Messiah's ministry, such as healing.



### 8.3. Positive characterisation of the Canaanite woman

As argued in the above section, the implied author portrayed the Canaanite woman as a non-Judean, an outsider and the other in the story. This type of designation of the Canaanite woman is akin to the contemporary Judean attitude towards non-Judeans. As an outsider, she was not entitled to enjoy the benefits of the insiders. However, like the story of the Magi and the healing of the centurion's servant, I argue that the implied author characterised the Canaanite woman positively in this story by contrasting her with other characters, mainly with Jewish leaders and Jesus' disciples. In addition to this literary feature, the implied author employed the placement of the story in the narrative, the geographical location, and the stereotypical labelling to characterise the Canaanite woman as an outsider. The way she addresses Jesus, as κύριε υἱὸς Δαβὶδ (Matt. 15:22), and κύριε (Matt. 15:27), and her approach to him, προσεκύνει αὐτῷ ("bowing down to him", Matt. 15:25) are other means through which the author intentionally characterised the woman positively. This is contrary to the general depiction of non-Judean characters in the gospel (see Chapter Four).

The implied author's positive characterisation of the Canaanite woman is set against the characterisation of the disciples in the surrounding stories. For instance, in the feeding narratives (Matt. 14:13-21; 15:32-16:10), Jesus' disciples are depicted as lacking faith, and this frustrates the Matthean Jesus. The Canaanite woman's story is placed between the two feeding stories. In these stories, while the woman is portrayed as showing a good understanding of the messianic blessings, such as healings, that are available even for outsiders to partake of or at least to be left crumbs of, the disciples, who witnessed the feeding miracles (i.e., messianic blessings) did not grasp their abundance. Furthermore, in the storm miracle story, they are portrayed as fearful (cf. Matt. 14:22-23).

The other way the implied author established the character of the Canaanite woman in the story, is by comparing her with the Judean leaders, such as the Pharisees and scribes. In the previous story (Matt. 15:1-11), these Judean leaders, reportedly based in Jerusalem (v. 1), the holy city, are depicted as unbelieving and hypocritical. However, the Canaanite woman, who is from Tyre and Sidon, an unholy land, is portrayed as believing (Patte, 1987: 220). The implied author accused the Jewish leaders, the Pharisees and scribes "from Jerusalem" (Matt. 15:1) of hypocrisy (Matt. 15:7-8) and of false teaching that nullifies the word of God in its zealous defence of the tradition (15:3-6, 9). They are depicted as shocked by Jesus' teaching (Matt.



15:12) and utterly blind (Matt. 15:14). Therefore, they are generally portrayed as not recognising the messianic activity of Jesus. On the other hand, the Canaanite woman is depicted as a person who recognises the messianic identity of Jesus, the Son of David. Therefore, she is characterised positively in the narrative.

Some scholars contend that this positive characterisation reflects the Matthean community's anti-Semitic tendency (Shin, 2014: 6). However, it is not clear how this positive characterisation of the non-Judean woman was seen by the Jewish leaders, because the presence of the character, either positive or negative, in the narrative world, does not necessarily imply acceptance or rejection in the contextual world unless one subscribes to the mirror-reading method. Furthermore, the story could be taken as a variation within Judaism, rather than an antithesis to Judaism. Therefore, we need a theoretical framework that links the narrative world with the contextual world, the context in which it was read.

In the story, the Canaanite woman is depicted as one whose eyes are open to see the true identity of Jesus, as the Son of David (Matt. 15:22). She recognises Jesus' identity and this is expressed by her bowing down before him in homage (Matt. 15:25); she refuses to be offended by Jesus' unwavering focus upon Israel (Matt. 15:24-27). This act of firm faith is commended by Jesus (Matt. 15:28). Nolland contends that, against the most common stereotypical portrayal of non-Judeans as not knowing the God of Israel in the gospel, the implied author portrayed the woman as one who recognises "the saving intervention of the God of Israel through his messiah" (Nolland, 2005: 632). Her recognition of the God of Israel is expressed through her act of "bowing down to him" (Matt. 15:25) and the phrases which she utters, calling him "Lord" (Matt 15:25), that show her acknowledgment of Jesus as Messiah.

As Nolland (2005:635) points out, in her conversation with Jesus about children and dogs, she exhibits her willingness to submit to the messianic shepherd-king of Israel. In the parable, while "the children" refers to the Judeans and "the dogs" to the non-Judeans (Gundry-Volf, 1995:517), the connotation of the word dog is disputed among scholars. Some contend that the word dog is used by Jesus as figurative speech, "not just to refuse... the woman but to insult her, the epithet 'dogs' for Gentiles had derogatory connotations" (Gundry-Volf, 1995:517). In the 1<sup>st</sup>-century Judean, culture dogs were "annoying and despised. . . [and] regarded as the most despicable, insolent and miserable of creatures" (Otto Michel, 1964: 1101). As Theissen argues, if Jesus' words are related to the socio-economic problem of the rural

dweller (Judeans) and the city dwellers (non-Judeans), the implied author was saying that the children's food should not be given to those who are not in the children category, in this case, the dogs. Theissen states that this is because "it is not good to take poor people's food and throw it to the rich Gentiles in the cities" (Theissen, 1991: 75). Therefore, the reference to non-Judeans as dogs had pejorative connotations in the context of Jesus' saying. On the other hand, other scholars, though they acknowledge the stereotypical labeling of dogs for non-Judeans, deny its derogatory connotations. Gundry-Volf argues that the implied author "could have in mind household pets rather than strays, since the dogs are pictured as eating by the table explicitly in the next verse and, perhaps, implicitly in the context of the feeding of the children. The use of the diminutive *κυνάριον* (*kynárion*) may suggest the meaning 'little dogs, puppies'" (Gundry-Volf, 1995:517; cf. Gundry, 1994:314-315). This reading is further supported by the woman's reply which makes the dogs members of the household. However, even if one accepts this non-pejorative use of the word, the distinction between the children and the dogs is very clear in Jesus' saying, because, as Gundry-Volf (1995:517) states, "[i]f one throws the bread to the dogs, the children will be deprived. And, after all, it is the children's bread" (Gundry-Volf, 1995:517).

However, I argue that in the story, the word dogs is probably used by Jesus and the woman in two different ways. While Jesus, due to the Judean culture, uses the word dogs in a sense that emphasises the outsidership of the woman, she, on the other hand, probably uses the word in the light of the socio-cultural framework she is situated in, where dogs are members of the household. Therefore, using the same parable Jesus used to communicate her outsidership, not belonging to "the lost sheep of Israel" to which Jesus' mission was directed, she "asserted that she could participate as a Gentile within the 'house of Israel'" (Willitts, 2009: 5).

As seen through the dogs vs. children metaphor, Jesus of the Matthean narrative clearly states the outsidership of non-Judeans, who did not have any right to partake in the kingdom blessings, which are called "the bread of the children". From the beginning, the woman seems not to be claiming that it is her right, for she prostrates herself before him, saying *ἐλέησόν με, κύριε υἱὸς Δαβὶδ... ἐλθοῦσα προσεκύνει αὐτῷ λέγουσα· κύριε, βοήθει μοι* ("Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David.... she bowed down before him, saying 'Lord, help me'", Matt. 15:22, 25). Through this action of the woman, the implied author seems to have characterised her positively by showing that, while the disciples did not understand the blessings of the kingdom, which were demonstrated in the feeding of the five thousand people (Matt. 14:13-21), the

woman diligently begged for it. Using her daily household experience as a means to understand Jesus' mission, she argued back that Jesus' exclusive mission, "only for the lost sheep of Israel", could not be an obstacle to her partaking of the blessings, because as dogs eat crumbs of the food prepared for children, she insisted on sharing the benefit of the blessings meant only for Judeans. This is her underlying reasoning, which is later commended by Jesus (Matt. 15:28). As we become clear in the next section, her understanding of the place of non-Judeans in the messianic salvation is in line with some of the Jewish traditions.

Matthean scholars have long noted the verbal similarity between the woman's expressions of appeal and Israel's lament psalms (Matt. 15:22 cf. Ps. 86:16; Matt. 15:25 cf. Ps. 109:26) (see Schweizer, 1975:330; Gundry, 1994:341). However, as O'Day points out, the similarity with "Israel's lament psalms goes deeper than verbal echoes in the woman's petitions" (O'Day, 2001:119). The story is crafted in a way that indicates the similarity between Israel's faith and the woman's faith, i.e., "Israel's placing of needs and hurts before God was an act of faith in God's presence and ability to respond. The Canaanite woman's act of placing her need before Jesus was also an act of faith" (O'Day, 2001: 123). He further states that, as in lament psalms, in which "Israel demands that God should be as God has promised to be", the Canaanite woman "is infused with this same spirit of defiant resistance to despair, and bold faith in God's promises" (O'Day, 2001: 123-124). However, O'Day does not go further to deal with the promises of God at which the Canaanite woman clutches. But there are shreds of evidence in the Gospel of Matthew which incline us to think the Canaanite woman's appeal is in line with the promise God made in the Old Testament which was anticipated to be fulfilled upon the coming of Israel's Messiah.

The woman's appeal shows not only her acknowledgment of the God of Israel but also her adherence to God's promises; this is contrary to the normal characterisation of non-Judeans in the Matthean narrative (cf. Chapter Four). As compared to the Jewish leaders, who knew the God of Israel but are depicted as not accepting the fulfilment of the promise of God, the Canaanite woman, who is considered an outsider, clings to the fulfilment of the promise God gave to Israel, which would also benefit non-Judeans, as will be discussed in the next section. Thus, this shows that the implied author intentionally characterised her positively in comparison to the Jewish leaders.

#### 8.4. The position of non-Judeans in an anticipated promise of Israel's restoration

The above discussion demonstrated that the Canaanite woman's words about the dogs eating the crumbs and the way she presented her appeal before Jesus was her way of holding on to the promise of God. However, the nature of the promise needs further explication to understand the implied author's positive characterisation of her. Throughout the Jewish tradition are a complex set of expectations regarding the promises God gave to Israel. However, these are primarily defined as the expectation that God would interfere in history to begin a new era for Israel. This expectation ignored contemporary circumstances which did not reflect the promises of peace and prosperity pledged in sacred traditions (Bird, 2006: 26). Variations of this hope developed in the post-exilic period, when most Jewish people either lived outside the Promised Land or were subjugated by a foreign government in their own land.

The idea of eschatological restoration included several expectations, including the re-gathering of the twelve tribes, the coming of the Messiah to overthrow the enemies of Israel and to inaugurate the era of peace and prosperity, and the defeat or inclusion of non-Judeans in Israel's restoration (Sanders, 2007:289-298; Wright, 1992:299-338; Dunn, 2003:393-396).

The restoration expectations associated with the subjugation or the inclusion of non-Judeans is of particular interest. Several Jewish sacred traditions anticipated the destruction of Gentiles at the eschatological restoration. Other traditions, however, awaited the pilgrimage of non-Judeans to the holy city to worship YHWH at the eschaton (Sanders, 1985: 77-119). Such paradoxical statements concerning non-Judeans are found in Isaiah, Zechariah, 1 Enoch, the *Sibylline Oracles*, 4 Ezra, 2 Baruch, the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*, and in the Mishnah.

Though "there existed no continuous, widespread, or dominant expectation of a Davidic messiah" (Pomykala, 1995: 270) in the period of early Judaism, there is evidence that links the restoration of Israel to the Davidic Messiah. For instance, in the Qumran community there was a high expectation of a Davidic Messiah in 4Q252 (*4QCommentary on Genesis<sup>a</sup>*) (Brooke, 1996: 185-207). In this passage, the Davidic king is explicitly mentioned as a messiah and is linked to Gen. 49:10, in which Jacob blesses his son Judah. The promises which are described in these writings regarding the coming king from the line of David, are the foundation for the author's anticipation of the restoration.

Furthermore, the *Psalms of Solomon* mentions a similar promise of anticipated restoration (cf. *Pss. Sol.* 17:21-46; 18:5-8). Fuller contends that “[t]he expectation of the messiah is motivated positively by the recollections of God’s promise of eternal kingship to David (17:4)” (Fuller, 2006:163). Therefore, in *Psalms of Solomon*, especially chapters 17 and 18, there is a link between the restoration of Israel and the Davidic king.

In Judean traditions such as the book of *Tobit*, evidence links this anticipated restoration of Israel with a non-Judean pilgrimage to worship the God of Israel, to partake in the blessings the anticipated messianic character would bring. This book mentions that many nations that are not a part of the covenant people of God, will bring gifts to the king of heaven (cf. *Tob.* 13:7-18a). It seems that the author of *Tobit* related this event to the restoration of Israel, for in chapter 14 he not only mentions the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple and regathering of the children of Israel but also that all nations will turn and fear God.

The theme of non-Judean pilgrimage is also prevalent in other Hellenistic Jewish literature, such as the *Sibylline Oracles*, in which the term ἔθνος occurs 26 times; in the third *Sibyl* alone it occurs ten times (Scott, 1995: 75-76). The word ἔθνος is often used to designate nation/s other than the Jews. In the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, there is a clear portrayal of the eschatological restoration of Israel and the pilgrimage of non-Judeans to the holy city (Charles, 1913:289-290).

On the other hand, other writings of the Second Temple period do not anticipate the inclusion of other nations in the eschatological restoration of Israel. For example, the *Psalms of Solomon* includes both positive and negative perspectives towards other nations (cf. (*Pss Sol.* 17:22-25; 17:30-31).

The above few examples show the juxtaposition of the divergent Jewish traditions regarding the inclusion of Gentiles or their destruction at the eschatological restoration of Israel in the same book (Sanders, 1985: 77-119). Thus, the *Psalms of Solomon* seems to pronounce that other nations will have no part in the restoration of Israel and their fate will be destruction (cf. *Ps. Sol.* 17:24-25), while at the same time it speaks of the anticipation that they will come to Jerusalem on pilgrimage bringing the exiles with them (*Pss. Sol.* 17:31), to experience the mercy of the Davidic king (*Pss. Sol.* 17:34).

However, despite these divergent traditions, the more dominant tradition is the pilgrimage of non-Judeans to Zion to worship God (cf. Isa 14:1; 56:6-8; Zeph. 3:8-9; Zec. 2:11; 8:20-23; *Tob.* 14:6-7; 2 Bar. 41:1-5; 42:4-5). It is more generally believed that the non-Judeans would simply acknowledge that God was God and would give him praise.

Based on the survey above, we can conclude that the idea of the eschatological inclusion of the non-Judeans is somehow interlinked with the restoration of Israel (Donaldson, 1997: 78).

Therefore, the implied author's depiction of the woman referring to Jesus as the Son of David and her cry for mercy in the pattern of lament psalms seem intended to evoke the above tradition, which anticipates non-Judean pilgrimage to participate in messianic blessings.

But, is the woman partaking of the blessings of the kingdom (cf. Matt. 15:28) without being allowed to be a part of the household, or is the metaphor used to show how outsiders, who are not entitled to be beneficiaries of the kingdom, are finally allowed to share the benefits of the householders? In other words, is she permitted to represent the ideal reader? I will argue that she is granted the full privilege of the kingdom through redefining the boundary which demarcates who are beneficiaries and who are not.

### **8.5. The Canaanite woman as a symbolic representation of non-Judeans and its role in forming the identity of the ideal readers' community**

In the 1<sup>st</sup>-century context, where the participation of non-Judean followers of Christ in the kingdom blessings and/or the ideal reader's community was disputable, the status of non-Judean followers of the Messiah was the foundational block of the 1<sup>st</sup>-century followers of Christ's community. It was one of the keys which determined the identity of the community. How did the implied author illustrate this?

I will argue that, by including the non-Judean characters in the narrative, the author showed that they were accepted as partakers of the blessings. However, they were included in the narrative not merely as an example or a reason; rather, the non-Judean characters in the narratives have a symbolic representational role, so that the story, consumed by the implied readers, demonstrates the very presence of the kingdom of God in which non-Judeans may also partake. To reach such a conclusion, we need to read the story using Barthes' semiological reading method as a heuristic reading tool.

### 8.5.1. Semiological reading of the story of the Canaanite woman

As discussed, contrary to the general characterisation of the non-Judeans in the narrative of the Gospel of Matthew, the implied author used various literary features to characterise the Canaanite woman positively compared with the Jewish leaders and Jesus' disciples (Matt. 15:21-28). This raises questions: How did the implied author want his stories to be received by the implied readers? How would they perceive the woman? Would the readers identify themselves with the positively characterised characters in the story? In other words, did he assume that the readers would understand the symbolic signification of the positively characterised characters? If so, what is this signification? These questions are not really addressed in Matthean scholarship.

The story of the Canaanite woman is constructed in a way that shows there was a clear demarcation between Judeans and non-Judeans. It focuses on the otherness or outsidership of the woman, but it also aimed to highlight the fact that the woman, as a non-Judean, also had the right to benefit from the blessings for Judeans upon the coming of the Messiah. As seen in the previous section, the beneficiary right emanated from the promises given in the Old Testament and the anticipation of their fulfilment with the coming of the Messiah. In those days it was anticipated that the Messiah would not only bring to fulfilment what was promised to Israel but would also fulfil the promise of beneficiary rights to non-Judeans. Therefore, the woman's claim to benefit from the blessing is in line with the 1<sup>st</sup>-century messianic anticipation and what that would bring for non-Judeans.

Does the woman's benefiting from the kingdom's blessings have ramifications for other readers, who are in the same outsider category as she is? Does her story have symbolic signification for the implied readers or the 1<sup>st</sup>-century readers? How does the woman's partaking in the kingdom's blessings redefine the beneficiaries of the blessings? Does the redefinition of the beneficiaries affect the identity of the readers' community? A satisfactory answer to these questions can be found by using Barthes' semiological reading method as a heuristic tool, which enables us to see the symbolic signification of the positively characterised woman in the story.

How did the implied readers receive this story? I will argue that Barthes' semiological reading method, specifically the second semiological order, assists us to see how the implied author intended the implied readers should read and receive the story.



### 8.5.1.1. *The first semiological order in the reading of Matt. 15:21-28*

In Barthes' semiological reading of the myth, the first order reading is the meaning the story communicates in its narrative world, the text of the narrative (Chatman, 1978:25); therefore, narrative criticism is best fitted to trace this meaning.

Thus, in the story of the healing of the Canaanite woman's daughter, Jesus and the Canaanite woman are the main characters of the story, and the disciples are the minor characters. The events of the story include the faith of the woman, the woman calling Jesus "Lord", the woman's prostration before Jesus, the disciples' request to send the woman away, and Jesus' healing of the daughter. The region of Sidon and Tyre is the geographical setting of the story, which shows that the story is situated in the marginal territory. Furthermore, the stereotypical labelling Canaanite is the social setting of the story. This is the signifier of the first order. Therefore, using these narrative features, the implied author aimed to communicate the concept which, in Barthes' term, is the signified of the first semiological order.

The story of the healing of the Canaanite woman's daughter confirms the identity of Jesus, the anticipated saviour-king, who came to restore Israel. However, the benefits he brought, the restoration of Israel, was not exclusively for Judeans, but, as reflected in Second Temple Jewish literature, non-Judeans also would benefit from it. Consequently, the claim of the Canaanite woman reflects this anticipation—she wants to partake of the blessings that are being realised through the coming of the Messiah.

The sign of the first semiological order is the combination of the signifier and signified. The story of the healing of the Canaanite woman's daughter is situated in Jesus' movement from a place considered clean to one considered unclean. This came after the dispute between Jesus and the Jewish leaders regarding the clean and unclean. The otherness or outsidership of the woman is mirrored in the social setting, and her marginality is reflected in her geographical setting. The apparently exclusive attitude of Jesus and his disciples shows that the woman, as a non-Judean, was not a rightful beneficiary of the blessings the Messiah brought. However, the appeal of the woman, which is presented in the manner of Israel's lament psalms, and her faith, based on the Judean tradition regarding the beneficiary rights of non-Judeans on the day the Messiah restored Israel, are respected by Jesus. Therefore, the story communicates that, against all the factors that exclude the woman from benefiting from the healing (the "children's bread"),



she clings to the promise reflected in the Jewish traditions that she, as a non-Judean, can claim to be a rightful beneficiary of the blessings the Messiah has brought. Jesus finally grants her request. Thus, the sign of the first semiological reading of the story is that Jesus is the Messiah, who has brought the anticipated messianic blessings, and the Canaanite woman, who is not entitled to benefit from these blessings, is granted the blessings.

#### ***8.5.1.2. The second mythological order in the story of the Canaanite woman and its foundational role***

Chapter Four dealt with the reading methodology deployed in this dissertation, explaining that the signifier of the second mythological order is the emptied form of the sign of the first mythological order. This empty form will be filled with the concept (signified) from the contextual world to become a sign (signification) in the second mythological order (Smit, 1994c: 45).

In the story of the healing of the Canaanite woman's daughter, even though the woman is considered an outsider, she is made a rightful partaker of the messianic blessings. This is the sign of the first semiological order. However, when this sign of the first semiological order becomes the signifier of the second semiological order, it is emptied of its narrative meaning and becomes an empty form. This empty form is filled with concepts (meanings) from the contextual world, in this case, a 1<sup>st</sup>-century dispute regarding whether non-Judeans were rightful beneficiaries of the messianic blessings with or without being part of the Judean community through the process of proselytisation. In such a context, the healing of the Canaanite woman's daughter signifies the idea that non-Judeans, who like the Canaanite woman are considered outsiders, can be beneficiaries of the messianic blessings if they acknowledge the God of Israel and hold on to the promise which is reflected in the Jewish tradition, without passing through the proselytisation rituals. This is the sign of the second semiological reading of the story. The mythological signification of the story of the healing of the Canaanite woman's daughter is that non-Judeans may be partakers of the blessings of the kingdom, such as healing, which the Messiah, the son of David, brought, without being a member of the Judean community through the proselytisation rituals.

The first semiological order of the story of the healing of the Canaanite woman:

*First order meaning: signifier* (The story of the healing of the Canaanite woman's daughter) + *signified* (Jesus is the Messiah, who has brought the anticipated messianic blessings) = *the sign* (Jesus is the Messiah, who has brought the anticipated messianic blessings, and the Canaanite woman, who is not entitled to benefit from these blessings, is granted the blessings).

The second semiological order of the story of the healing of the Canaanite woman:

*Second order meaning: signifier* (The story that Jesus is the Messiah, who has brought the anticipated messianic blessings, and the Canaanite woman, who is not entitled to benefit from these blessings, is granted the blessings) + *signified* (non-Judeans are rightful beneficiaries of the messianic blessings) = *the sign* (the healing of the Canaanite woman's daughter signifies the idea that non-Judeans, who like the Canaanite woman are considered as outsiders, can be beneficiaries of the messianic blessings if they acknowledge the God of Israel and hold on to the promise which is reflected in the Jewish tradition, without passing through the proselytisation rituals).

### **8.5.2. The role of the story of the Canaanite woman in forming the identity of the ideal readers' community**

We have seen that the mythological signification of the story of the healing of the Canaanite woman's daughter is the non-Judean participation in the blessings of the kingdom, which were brought by the Messiah-king, the Son of David, without having to pass through specific proselytisation ritual processes. Thus, the story has a role in forming the identity of the community of ideal readers. Firstly this is because the woman is an outsider, not part of the communities who are the rightful beneficiaries—children of the messianic blessings. However, the socio-religious system of the 1<sup>st</sup> century offered a means through which outsiders could be included in the community. To be part of the Judean community and get the membership benefits, it was necessary to pass through the proselytisation process. Nonetheless, the Canaanite woman, without such a process, benefits from it by just acknowledging the God of Israel and holding onto the promises he gave. Therefore, her story is not just an example of how non-Judeans became the beneficiaries of the kingdom; it is the realisation of it. The story not only shows the redefinition of the entrance requirements but also demonstrates the re-

composition of its members. This is the redefinition of the boundary of the rightful beneficiaries, children of the messianic blessings.

Secondly, as explained in Chapter Three, “for the myth-reader . . . everything happens as if the picture [in our case the story] *naturally* conjures up the concept as if the signifier *gave a foundation* to be signified” (Barthes, 1972:129, his emphases). Therefore, the story of the Canaanite woman, as a signifier, gives a foundation for the signified partaking of the messianic blessing, the “children’s food”, without passing through the proselytisation process, just by acknowledging the God of Israel and clinging to the promises he has given. This shows that, as the story is consumed by the readers, it naturally invokes the concept of non-Judean participation in the messianic blessings, and it offers a foundation for the participation of non-Judeans in these messianic blessings without passing through the proselytisation process. Their participation changes the composition of the 1<sup>st</sup>-century Christian community, because it changes the identity of the rightful beneficiaries from ethnic Judeans to a community consisting of both ethnic Judeans and non-Judeans who acknowledge the God of Israel and embrace the promises he has made. Thus, the story reshapes the boundary of the community, it determines who is in and out of the community. It forms the identity of the ideal readers’ community. The identity of the community of rightful beneficiaries is no longer determined in terms of Jewishness, rather it is based on acknowledging the God of Israel and its Messiah. From the vantage point of the end, this woman, like the centurion, not only foreshadows the many from all the nations who will turn to Jesus in faith but also shows a realisation of the promise God gave regarding the incoming and participation of non-Judeans in the messianic blessings. The woman is like the Magi, who bowed before Jesus, recognising his messianic identity as well as the blessings associated with his coming.

If the story evokes the realisation of non-Judeans’ inclusion into the community of “the children”, the identity and the boundary of the children is redefined. Its identity is no longer associated with being Judean or having been converted to Judaism by various means, but with acknowledging the God of Israel and its Messiah. Therefore, I argue that the story of the Canaanite woman has a role in redefining the identity of the ideal readers’ community. They are a new group of people, reconstituted Israel, founded on Israel’s tradition, which permits non-Judeans to be a part of their community and to be partakers of the messianic blessings.

### 8.5.3. Conclusion

This chapter analysed the healing story of the Canaanite woman's daughter. I argued that the implied author used various means to communicate the otherness of the Canaanite woman, such as the placement of the story in the narrative, the geographical location in which the story reportedly took place, the reference to the woman as Canaanite, the disciples' appeal to send her away, and Jesus' two responses to her supplication (Matt. 15:21-28). Though the implied author depicted her as an outsider, which implied that she was not entitled to partake in the messianic blessings, he positively characterised the woman in the story by contrasting her with other characters, mainly with Jewish leaders and Jesus' disciples. The placement of the story between the two feeding miracle stories, highlights the implied author's contrast between the disciples, who lacked understanding of the messianic identity of Jesus, and the woman, whose eyes were open to see the true identity of Jesus, the Son of David. Furthermore, compared to the Jewish leaders, who knew the God of Israel but are depicted as not accepting the fulfilment of the promise of God, the Canaanite woman, who was considered an outsider, clung to the fulfilment of the promise God gave to Israel, which would also benefit non-Judeans. I argued that these positive characterisations have symbolic signification, which was explicated through Barthes' semiological reading tools. In the first semiological reading, the story communicates an idea that Jesus is the Messiah, who has brought the anticipated messianic blessings, and the Canaanite woman, who is not entitled to benefit from these blessings, is granted the blessings. However, in the second semiological reading, granting the non-Judean woman participation in the messianic blessings signifies that non-Judeans are allowed to be partakers of the blessings of the kingdom, such as healing, which the Messiah, the Son of David, brought, without being a member of the Judean community through the proselytisation rituals. Furthermore, this signification has a role in forming the identity of the ideal readers' community, because the story symbolically signifies the participation of non-Judeans in the kingdom blessings without passing through the proselytisation rites. I argued that this is not just an example of how non-Judeans became participants in the kingdom's blessings; it is the realisation of the promise regarding the participation of non-Judeans in the kingdom blessings. The story not only redefines the entrance requirement, but also demonstrates the reconstitution of members. In so doing, it shows the redefinition of the boundary of the rightful beneficiaries, children of the messianic blessings.

The chapter argued that the way the implied author depicted the Canaanite woman has a role in forming the identity of the ideal readers' community. In the story, the woman's positive characterisation, as one who recognises the messianic identity of Jesus and his messianic blessings, and Jesus granting her request without demanding that she become part of the entitled community through a proselytisation process, has symbolic signification. It signifies allowing non-Judeans to partake in the kingdom blessings without performing the necessary rites. Therefore, I argue, if non-Judeans are allowed to be a part of the community which is entitled to the messianic blessings, the identity of this community is redefined, its boundary is reshaped, and entry requirements to the community are set aside.

## Chapter Nine

### 9. Conclusion and recommendation for further research

#### 9.1. Conclusion

The study began with the assumption that texts have identity-forming roles. With this assumption in mind, it attempted to answer the question, Why does the author of the Gospel of Matthew include non-Judean characters in his narrative? After briefly discussing the major emphases of past Matthean scholarship, the debate regarding the Matthean community, and other issues, the study showed that there is a gap in explicating the role of the characters in the Gospel of Matthew, specifically the negatively stereotyped non-Judean figures as well as positively characterised individual non-Judean figures, in forming the identity of the implied readers, i.e., the ideal readers' community. This research has filled this lacuna in Matthean scholarship by explaining the role of these non-Judean characters in the narrative in shaping the identity of the ideal readers' community.

In my attempt to fill this gap in Matthean scholarship, I developed an interpretative tool that enabled me to elucidate the function of non-Judeans figures in the Matthean narrative. I used the socio-narrative reading method as a heuristic interpretive tool to find an answer to the research question stated above. This interpretative tool merges socio-scientific criticism, narrative criticism, and semiological reading through social identity, narrative, and semiotic theories. The study argued that the implied author used the non-Judean characters to form the identity of the ideal readers' community. The intentional use of these characters in the Matthean narrative is mythmaking, aiming to communicate an ideology that permits non-Judeans to be partakers of the messianic blessings. I contended that how the implied author depicted the characters in his narrative, such as the non-Judean figures, plays an important role in forming the identity of the ideal readers' community. Though the characters in the narrative were shaped to communicate certain ideologies and function as myths, I argued that it is not a purely fictive narrative. Therefore, we can understand the characters in the narrative and their function by understanding the socio-historical world with which they correlate. In other words, if we understand how non-Judeans were perceived in the real world of Matthew, we better understand how they function in his myth-creating narrative.

Using this reading tool, I first analysed the way the implied author characterised the non-Judeans stereotypically in a negative way to depict them as outsiders (see. Matt. 5:47; 6:7; 6:32; 18:17; and 20:19). I argued that these stereotypical negative characterisations of non-Judeans, as welcoming only their allies, ignorant of God, outsiders, with an authoritarian ruling model—as shown specifically in Jesus’ teaching—play a role in setting the boundaries of the ideal readers’ community. This kind of characterisation depicts non-Judeans as others, as outsiders; thus, it forms the identity of the ideal readers’ community which is in line with a social identity construction theory that states that society often forms its identity in the light of others.

This was demonstrated by first explicating the way the implied author used negatively stereotyped non-Judean characterisations in Matt. 5:47; 6:7; 6:32; 18:17; and 20:19 to shape the identity of the ideal readers’ community. I contend that in these passages the words τὰ ἔθνη and ὁ ἔθνηκός were used by the implied author to emphasise the otherness of non-Judeans, not only in a sense of not knowing the God of the Judeans, but also in their resulting behaviour, expressed by loving only their familial ties (tribalism), attempting to manipulate God by uttering meaningless words, striving for things that only God can provide, being sinners, and having an oppressive style of ruling. Furthermore, I argued that the implied author exemplified this negative stereotypical characterisation of non-Judeans in Jesus’ teaching through stories about individual non-Judeans, such as the Gadarenes, Pilate, and the Roman soldiers, in which they are characterised negatively (cf. Matt. 8:28-34; 27:1-26; 27:62-66; 27:27-28:15). Therefore, generally, the author of the Gospel of Matthew characterised non-Judeans as a group in a negative stereotypical manner, showing their otherness or their outsidership.

The study then analysed four passages (i.e., Matt. 1:1-17; 2:1-10; 8:5-13; and 15:21-28) and argued that the implied author used individual non-Judean figures in these Matthean narratives—the four non-Judeans in the genealogy account, the Magi, the centurion, and the Canaanite woman—to form the identity of the ideal readers’ community. However, these individual non-Judeans were characterised positively by the implied author. I argued that this positive characterisation also has a role in forming the identity of the ideal readers’ community. In the context, in which the participation of the non-Judeans to become the beneficiaries of the messianic blessings was contested, these stories have ramifications for shaping not only the perception of the ideal readers but also the composition of the ideal readers’ community. It

constitutes the members of this community. It defines the identity as well as boundaries of this community.

In the context in which the genealogical purity of God's people, who were perceived as the only heirs of the messianic blessings, was given much emphasis, the naming of the four non-Judeans (Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and "the wife of Uriah") in the Matthean genealogical account (Matt. 1:1-17) plays a role in reconstituting the identity of the legitimate recipients of the messianic blessings. The common characteristics of the four mentioned are they were non-Judeans, outsiders of the community, who had a relationship with God; however, they were included in this community because they married someone who was an insider. However, there was a Deuteronomic law that seems to have forbidden insiders from associating with outsiders, and from the time of Ezra and Nehemiah this law was interpreted as strictly forbidding marriage with someone outside the Judean community. People who had married non-Judeans were even forced to divorce them on the basis of the purity of the insiders. This ideology is the background against which the genealogical account of the Gospel of Matthew is the best read. The naming of the four non-Judeans makes sense when we read it against this background. I argued that the inclusion of the four non-Judeans, who were assimilated into the community through intermarriage, was intended to reshape the identity of God's people. Therefore, the implied author crafted the genealogical account, specifically the inclusion of the four non-Judeans, aiming to show that the ideal readers' community should have an inclusive identity. Furthermore, the implied author used genealogy as the origin of the myth of society, and distortion in this myth, the inclusion of the four non-Judeans, was intended to convey a secondary meaning which is linked to the question of identity. Therefore, I contended that the inclusion of the non-Judeans within the Matthean genealogy account was aimed at communicating the realisation of the inclusion of non-Judeans into a community with a legitimate right to the messianic blessings. Through Barthes' semiological reading method, the study showed that the secondary meaning of the genealogy account was aimed at refuting an ideology that propagated the biological purity of Judeans and prevented non-Judean assimilation into the community. Their being assimilated into the community through intermarriage was opposed to the demand for proselytisation to be a part of the community. While the refutation of genealogical purity shows the change in the internal composition of the community, assimilation through intermarriage shows a change in community entry requirements. Therefore, the genealogy account, specifically the inclusion of the four non-Judeans in it,



reshapes the identity of the ideal readers' community, which is, as I argue, a reconstituted Israel that defines its identity in terms of Judean traditions.

The other character group examined in this dissertation is the Magi, found in Matt. 2:1-12. Though some Matthean scholars like David Sim reject the non-Judean identity of the Magi, I argued that the textual as well as contextual evidence, testify to the non-Judean identity of the Magi. If the Magi were non-Judeans, what is the role they play in the Matthean narrative? Specifically, I addressed the role that the Magi, as Matthean characters, played in shaping the social identity of the ideal readers' community.

The study argued that the implied author positively characterised the Magi in the narrative through their actions, as those who received a glimpse of light and followed it, as compared to the Jewish leaders, who received vivid promises and scriptural evidence about the birthplace of their Messiah and his promise but did not show any interest in the incident, and as compared to the Jewish leaders, King Herod and the people of Jerusalem, who planned to suppress interest in the event or were terrified of its consequences. The implied author depicted the Magi positively, as gladly accepting the light they had received and going to search for the new-born king to pay homage to him. This positive characterisation has symbolic signification that pertains to forming the identity of the ideal readers' community. I unpacked the ramifications of their symbolic signification using Barthes' semiological reading method.

I argued that, in the first semiological order, the story of the Magi signifies the meaning of the story in its narrative world, that is, the newly born baby Jesus who is a saviour-king. However, in the second semiological order, the story signifies the anticipated salvific vocation of the saviour-king extending beyond the boundary of Judeans, and non-Judeans welcomed to celebrate it. Thus, it implies non-Judeans' inclusion into the ideal readers' community.

If the story of Magi signifies the inclusion of non-Judeans into the ideal readers' community, it not only legitimises the inclusion, but also reshapes the identity of this community, because non-Judeans are identified as included amongst the rightful heirs of the messianic blessings that the newly born saviour-king brought. Therefore, I argue that the implied author used the story of the Magi to form the identity of the ideal readers' community.

The author of the Gospel of Matthew probably included the story of the Magi to address the debate on the inclusion of non-Judeans in the 1<sup>st</sup>-century context. Though the story of the Magi in the Matthean narrative was aimed primarily at affirming the identity of the newly born Judean saviour-king, Jesus, the positive characterisation of the Magi in the context in which non-Judeans were perceived negatively, leads us to look for additional meaning—an ideological meaning—which the author wanted to communicate to the reader. This meaning is related to the symbolic signification of the Magi: the inclusion of non-Judeans into the community. Their inclusion assumes the reconstitution and redefinition of God's people and a reconfiguration of perceptions of non-Judeans.

The story of the healing of the centurion's servant (Matt. 8:5-13) is another passage analysed to discover the role of its inclusion in the Matthean narrative. I argued that the implied author positively characterised the centurion in the story. The positive characterisation is first exhibited in the story through his act of pleading for mercy for his servant. This action of the centurion is contrary to Jesus' stereotypical negative labelling of non-Judeans in his teaching (see Matt. 20:25). The centurion is not only depicted in a stereotypical positive way in his manner of pleading for his servant but also in his recognition of God's authority. Though the implied author generally characterised non-Judeans through Jesus' teaching as those who did not know God, the centurion, in his conversation with Jesus, shows his recognition of God's authority. Furthermore, the testimony of Jesus about the centurion's faith in Jesus' messianic identity is another element in the story through which the implied author characterised the centurion positively as opposed to Jesus' general teaching on the mountain about non-Judeans.

I argued that this positive characterisation of the centurion has symbolic signification. This was examined using Barthes' semiological reading as a heuristic tool. I contend that in the first mythological order the signification of the story of the healing of the centurion's servant testifies to the healing authority of Jesus, which affirms his messianic identity. However, the signification of the story in the second semiological order is that non-Judeans are also the beneficiaries of the messianic blessings, such as healing. This idea was contested in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. Therefore, I argued that the mythological signification of the healing story of the centurion's servant is that it highlights non-Judean participation in the blessings of the kingdom brought by the saviour-king.

Furthermore, this mythological signification of the story is related to its role in forming the identity of the community of ideal readers. The story is not just an example of non-Judeans who benefited from the kingdom's blessings, nor is it a justification for non-Judean participation in it. Rather, it shows the intention of the implied author. Therefore, I argued that the story itself, as it is consumed by readers, naturally evokes the concept of non-Judean participation in the kingdom. It lays a foundation for the participation of non-Judeans in the blessings of the kingdom, and their participation changes the composition of the 1<sup>st</sup>-century Christian community; thus, it reshapes the boundary of the community; it determines who is in and out of the community.

The final passage analysed in this dissertation is found in Matt. 15:21-28, the story of the healing of the Canaanite woman's daughter. I argued that, on one hand, the implied author used various literary means, such as the placement of the story in the narrative, the geographical location in which the reported event took place, the reference to the woman as a Canaanite, the disciples' appeal to send her away, and Jesus' two responses to her supplication (Matt. 15:21-28), to show the otherness or the outsidership of the Canaanite woman as a non-Judean. On the other hand, the author characterised the Canaanite woman in the story positively by comparing her with the Jewish leaders, the Pharisees and scribes. In the previous story (Matt. 15:1-11), these Jewish leaders, reportedly based in Jerusalem (v.1), the holy city, are depicted as unbelieving and hypocritical. However, the Canaanite woman from Tyre and Sidon, an unholy land, is portrayed as believing. The implied author accused the Jewish leaders, the Pharisees and scribes "from Jerusalem" (Matt. 15:1) of hypocrisy (Matt. 15:7-8) and of false teaching that nullifies the word of God in its zealous defence of the tradition (15:3-6, 9). They are depicted as shocked by Jesus' teaching (Matt. 15:12) and utterly blind (Matt. 15:14). Therefore, they are generally portrayed as those who did not recognise the messianic activity of Jesus. However, the Canaanite woman is depicted as a person who recognises the messianic identity of Jesus, the Son of David, and holds to God's promises to benefit from the blessing, which is in line with the 1<sup>st</sup>-century messianic anticipation and what it would bring for non-Judeans. This demonstrates that the woman is characterised positively in the narrative.

I argued that this positive characterisation of the Canaanite woman has symbolic signification, and investigated the symbolic signification of the story using Barthes' semiological reading as a heuristic reading tool. This led to the conclusion that the sign of the

first semiological reading of the story is that Jesus is the Messiah, who brought the anticipated messianic blessings, and the Canaanite woman, who is not entitled to benefit from these blessings, is granted the blessings. However, the second semiological order reading of the story of the healing of the Canaanite woman's daughter, is that non-Judeans may partake in the blessings of the kingdom, such as healing, which the Messiah, the son of David, brought, without becoming members of the Judean community through the proselytisation rituals.

If the positive characterisation of the Canaanite woman has a symbolic signification that shows that non-Judeans are rightful heirs of the kingdom's blessings, this changes the social composition of the beneficiaries' community. The story shows that, to receive the membership benefits, it is no longer necessary to pass through the proselytisation process. I have argued that the story not only shows the redefinition of the entrance requirements but also demonstrates the re-composition of its members. This reveals the redefinition of the boundary of the rightful beneficiaries, "children", of the messianic blessings. The non-Judean participation changes the composition of the 1<sup>st</sup>-century Christian community because it changes the identity of the rightful beneficiaries from ethnic Judeans to a community consisting of both ethnic Judeans and non-Judeans who acknowledge the God of Israel and embrace the promises he gave. Thus, the story reshapes the boundary of the community and determines who is in and out of the community. It forms the identity of the ideal readers' community.

In Chapter One, I set a hypothesis that while the stereotypically negative characterisation of non-Judean in Matthean narrative are aimed in forming the outside boundary of the Ideal readers' community, the inclusion of positively depicted non-Judeans in the Matthean narrative has a symbolic representational role that was aimed at reshaping the identity of the ideal readers' community. The analysis made has proven the case that the negatively stereotyped non-Judeans in the narrative in general are used by the implied author to separate the community from the non-Judean society, i.e., set the outside boundary marker and the positively depicted non-Judeans are used to reshape the identity of the community, who are the rightful beneficiaries the messianic blessings. Thus, the beneficiary rights that were restricted to the Judean community were re-configured and it became Judeans and non-Judeans, who align themselves with the Messiah. Thus, it has a role in forming the identity of the ideal readers' community.

## **9.2. Recommendation for further research**

I have attempted to explore the role of the individual non-Judean characters, such as the four non-Judeans in the genealogy account, the Magi, the centurion, and the Canaanite woman in the Matthean narrative as well as stereotypical negative characterisation of non-Judeans in Jesus' teaching in forming the identity of the ideal readers' community using the socio-narrative reading method as a heuristic tool. This investigation on identity formation is one-sided and does not encompass all aspects of the role of all characters of the Matthean narrative in forming the identity of the ideal readers' community. Therefore, the other aspects of identity formation, namely the role of Judean figures in Matthean narrative in forming the identity of the ideal readers' community using socio-narrative reading as a heuristic tool, still need to be investigated. Furthermore, I believe reading the whole Matthean narrative using socio-narrative reading as an exploratory tool will be helpful for the fruition of Matthean scholarship.

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